

Youth Employment Skills Program Evaluation

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report summarizes the findings and conclusions of an evaluation of the Youth Employment Skills (YES) Program. The study is primarily a formative review, with the goal of informing the Ministry's efforts to reform and improve youth programming to fit the mandate of the Division and Ministry, as well as informing decisions about the selection of projects and contractors. It also addresses such summative issues as the effectiveness of the program in achieving goals and objectives.

The study involved extensive primary data collection through surveys of past and current program participants, project contractors, Ministry Training Consultants, MSS Social Workers and Financial Assistance Workers, employers who provided work placements for participants, managers and administrative staff within the Ministry, and other community stakeholders -- particularly those interested in the welfare of youth on Income Assistance or Youth in Care. Just under 500 interviews were conducted, most by telephone. Site visits were made to five projects, and on-site discussions were held with some youth who were unreachable by telephone, particularly those involved with outreach oriented projects.

The general consensus of administrators, deliverers and youth participants is that the YES program is both worthwhile in what it offers to young people, and in the effects that it has had in helping them move towards employment. Yet most groups interviewed expressed concerns about recent changes to the program's focus, and the processes used within the Ministry to deliver the program and to effect change. In particular, a gap in service to those 18 and under, and those most in need of harm reduction supports was identified.

Support for the goal of the YES program was universally high. Over 80% of Training Consultants felt that YES was meeting its official goal, and over 90% felt that the goal was still appropriate. Over 90% of Social Workers and Financial Assistance Workers felt that the program was meeting its goal and that the goal was appropriate. Similar support for the goal of YES was expressed by contractors. There was a significant caveat to this support expressed by respondents. While most felt that the goal was appropriate, many expressed the view that the program goal was too narrow and employment-focused, particularly considering the program's multi-barriered target client group.

Survey respondents stated that the YES program has been providing a range of activities and supports to youth that have been effective in helping youth move towards long-term employment. The program's perceived strengths were its flexibility, diversity of project activities, and accessibility for youth with a wide range of needs and supports. It has provided an effective link between harm reduction and basic maintenance supports, and help in obtaining more active labour market participation. Many of the program's past clients were far from being employed -- they faced multiple barriers and needed extensive and on-going assistance to reach

a goal of employment and economic independence. YES has in the past addressed these needs, and based on the perceptions of those interviewed for this study, was successful in doing so. It continues to address the needs of the high-end, almost job-ready client.

The most commonly undertaken activities by participants were getting help in writing a resume, obtaining information about jobs, and help in their job search, all of which were obtained by over 80% of participants. Among the most frequently hoped for activities by participants were work experience and training, which were actually undertaken by less than half of respondents to the surveys. The activities ranked most useful by participants tended to be those obtained by less participants: help finding a place to live, work experience opportunities, and support during a crisis. Harm reduction activities appear to have had a strong and useful role in YES projects, and they were highly valued when provided.

A portrait of YES participants was developed based on the participant surveys:

- 75% completed their projects
- 50% male, 50% female
- 15% belong to an ethnic or visible minority group
- 45.5% of participants age 15-18, 54.5% age 19 or older
- 88% of participants single and never married
- 18% of participants with children under their care post-program
- 51% had grade 10 or less education

The average cost per participant for YES projects was \$1,691.00, with an average cost per participant per week of \$126.00. The average duration of a YES project was just under 15 weeks, with a range of from about one week to a full year (52 weeks). The average time in work experience was just under three weeks.

TCs, contractors and MSS staff had diverse definitions of success for YES participants. Obtaining employment or being closer to obtaining it were key parts of the definitions of staff of the two ministries, while for contractors this ranked below participants' personal development or increased self-esteem. For all three groups being active and showing progress towards being employable were considered more important than employment, labour force attachment or even getting off assistance. It was clear that most contractors and the majority of field staff dealing with clients view employment as a long-term outcome, and not something that is immediately achievable for the majority of YES participants.

Youth themselves were extremely focused on employment as a goal. They consistently indicated that this was their key objective in participating in YES, but most also indicated that they believed further education or training was an important factor in how they were going to obtain employment. YES participants described the program as having an impact on several types of ability related to obtaining

employment, including essential employability skills as defined by the Conference Board of Canada; working with others, attitudes to work, and communication skills.

Youth age 15-18 were seen by contractors and government staff as being less mature, less capable of or ready to make decisions about their work or their lives, with less education, work experience, life skills, stability, or commitment to the program than those 19 and older. Younger participants were described as having more need of harm reduction supports and basic life skills programming. The participant surveys showed younger aged clients to be marginally less likely to complete projects, be employed after the program, or take skill training after the program than those age 19 and over. Those 15-18 were more likely to enroll in educational upgrading or school completion programs, and to have received harm reduction types of support. Participants age 15-18 were also more likely than those 19 or older to identify either getting a job or getting work experience as their most hoped for benefit from YES.

The constant change and shifting program and policy environment have contributed to an atmosphere of insecurity within the Ministry and without. Staff and contractors expressed concern about the consistency of messages received in regional office and local communities from head office. The survey of contractors indicated diverse views regarding the Ministry / contractor relationship. In cases where the Ministry representative was in regular contact with the contractor, views of the Ministry tended to be positive. However, in situations where several months passed between liaison with the Ministry, MSTL was assessed as being overly bureaucratic and inflexible. Training Consultants expressed a need for training related to their responsibilities, and better clarification of headquarters expectations concerning regional decision making autonomy in delivering programs and developing projects.

Youth were far less involved in program decision making and project approvals than anticipated. In part this reflected the shift from MSS to MSTL, and the subsequent rolling over of projects without many opportunities to involve youth in decisions. It also reflected staff's lack of knowledge or training in how to go about inviting and securing youth involvement in the project selection process. Some contractors involved youth in planning for projects, but it has tended to be haphazard.

Elements of successful projects were examined for the program. Key indicators of project success for Training Consultants were 1) participant outcomes, 2) meeting stated project objectives, 3) completion rates for participants, and 4) good project management and staff. Contractors' key factors for project effectiveness included flexibility in dealing with diverse needs of youth and involving youth in planning activities. Having a training allowance or wage stipend was considered important by government staff, but contractors and youth participants expressed less need for a training allowance, indicating that program availability was more important.

Project activities associated with an increased probability of post-program paid employment include: job search assistance, training for specific skills, work experience and higher educational attainment prior to YES. Project activities associated with post-program education include: help finding a place to live, help accessing educational upgrading, completing the project, lower educational attainment prior to YES, and being younger in age.

The study identified several types of best practices, summarized in abbreviated form:

Best Administrative Practices: Currently done by some but not all . . .

- Develop mutual and reciprocal relationships with contractors.
- Ensure that all contractors have access to internet e-mail.
- Develop and maintain project manuals that provide listings of local projects, contact names and numbers, referral links and support programs and services, and make this broadly available.
- Promote and develop Assessment, Counselling and Referral centres.
- Promote skill acquisition and professional development among contractors.
- Improve communication of expectations to staff, and conduct consultations with staff prior to implementing major program changes.
- Improve the Ministry's internal computer client tracking system.
- Provide more and better training for staff with respect to their roles as contract administrators.
- Provide opportunities for staff to interact and share information and best practices related to administration and innovative project activities.
- Provide timely response on contractor invoicing and inquiries.

Best Administrative Practices: It would be nice if we could . . .

- Develop centralized or coordinated work experience and placement options.
- Develop centralized follow-up processes where appropriate.
- Address unnecessary competition among funders through the RFP process, or through alternatives to the RFP process.
- Develop a catalogue of relevant training materials and curricula that contractors could share / sell / purchase / adapt to meet their clients' needs.

Best Practices for Youth Involvement

- Contact young people when an issue arises, vs. having them participate in existing bureaucratic structures.
- Provide real and adequate resources for consumer involvement and consultation.
- Use existing youth groups and coalitions to access and consult on important issues.

- Maintain better interministerial coordination on youth issues at senior levels.
- Provide opportunities for and invite youth to be involved with former projects as advisors, advisory committee members, peer counsellors, workshop facilitators.
- Develop a youth advisory committee for the program composed of former participants. Provide them with training and resources.

Best Practices: Ministry and Contractor Activities:

- Develop two to four page project summaries that could be shared with other regions and offices across the province.
- Try to develop a diverse range of projects that can ladder together with other programs and services, and build on links among agencies.
- Clarify referral processes with local stakeholders, and facilitate communication among those dealing directly with clients.
- Promote and facilitate community linkages among contractors, referral agencies, school boards, and other stakeholder groups such as Child and Youth Committees and the BC Youth in Care Network.
- Promote participant-initiated follow-up by offering tangible benefits to participants for keeping in touch -- free resume printing / copying, opportunities to be involved with later groups as peer counsellors, opportunities to socialize, etc.
- Provide learning opportunities suitable to a client group that does not fare well in traditional classroom settings.
- Provide quick placement for clients who are ready for the experience -- delays and waiting lists impact on participant motivation and success.

Best Practices: Important Project Elements:

- Work experience, particularly full-time, of longer duration (8+ weeks), in meaningful settings, and with opportunities to review and discuss the experience.
- Skill training, in areas of likely possible local employment, and linked to work placement opportunities.
- Good harm reduction supports that can be accessed through other programs and services. Ensure all contractors have copies of program and service guides.
- Appropriate supports to address client employment barriers: bus passes, childcare, employment expenses.

As a final point, the conclusions to the report address the gap in service to clients, which remains a key issue for the Ministry to address in the short and long term. Much of the discussion about the gap in service has been about whether YES should be administered by MSS or MoEST. NHN recommends that in the short term the Ministry undertake activities to clearly identify and address the gap in services on an interim basis. In the longer term, a dialogue concerning mandate, responsibility, capability and resources should be undertaken, and this should involve the Youth Transition Commissioner. Longer term action should also

address the need for a broad youth strategy that can address issues of interministerial linkages and youth needs.

1. INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes the findings and conclusions of an evaluation of the Youth Employment Skills (YES) Program. The study is primarily a formative review, with the goal of informing the Ministry's efforts to reform and improve the YES program (and youth programming generally) to fit the mandate of the Division and Ministry, as well as informing decisions about the selection of projects and contractors. It also addresses such summative issues as the effectiveness of the program in achieving goals and objectives. One further objective of the evaluation is to inform the Ministry about the state of the program, and how it is being delivered in local communities.

The context of ongoing and increasing fiscal pressures, as well as the changing and increasingly competitive economic environment has led the Government of British Columbia to enhance its ability to offer active forms of labour market support to individuals in receipt of Income Assistance (IA). This has meant providing people with a variety of supports other than purely financial assistance, including work experience, education, and training opportunities, and making these available to those most in need. It also underlies more recent and comprehensive program and service changes, including the introduction of BC Benefits and Youth Works.

The context for youth programming and the YES program in particular is singularly imperative, and important to keep in mind when reviewing evaluation findings presented in this report. Consistently high levels of youth unemployment (typically between 5 and 10% above those of the general population), increasing skill demands in even the most basic of work settings, and inadequate school-to-work transition supports make it extremely difficult for today's youth to break into the job market. As Krahn has noted,¹ school-to-work transition in Canada is a moving target, affected by rapid global economic change, industrial restructuring in Canada and BC, and ongoing educational reform. Other writers have recently noted that we are in danger of having a "lost generation" of individuals who never achieve a strong or long-term attachment to the workforce.² For Youth in Care and youth who are receiving Income Assistance this situation is even more difficult. These individuals face such additional barriers as personal and family difficulties, limited or non-existent support networks, and low levels of educational attainment. In an already difficult environment they can find it an overwhelming task to obtain even the most basic of opportunities in which to develop work skills.

This evaluation study involved administrative file review, and almost 500 interviews with past participants, program administrators in two government ministries,

¹ Harvey Krahn, "School-Work Transition: Changing Patterns and Research Needs," p. 6. Consultation paper prepared for Human Resources Development Canada, February 1996.

² Jeremy Rifken, *The End of Work*. 1994; Jamie Swift, *The Revolution of Falling Expectations*. 1995.

contractors, employers and other community stakeholders. The primary research for the evaluation was conducted between December 1995 and April 1996.

1.1 Background on the YES program

In the fall of 1993, responsibility for training programs for income assistance recipients was transferred from the Ministry of Social Services (MSS) to the newly formed Ministry of Skills, Training and Labour (MSTL) as part of a government-wide restructuring of programs and ministries. This transfer involved detailed and lengthy administrative and structural changes. The YES program came under the jurisdiction of the Training and Employability (T&E) Branch in the Skills Development Division. Since that time, T&E Branch and field staff have reviewed and enhanced YES and other programs, bringing them in line with MSTL's mandate.

The YES program was developed to address some of the needs of Youth in Care and youth who are in receipt of Income Assistance in their quest to obtain long-term employment. The YES program seeks to provide a supportive and flexible training environment to youth who face employment barriers, through funding projects that offer a combination of personal supports, training and work experience opportunities.³ The program is provided within a context that recognizes employment barriers for this target group such as being victims of domestic violence, neglect, sexual abuse and exploitation, substance addictions, limited support networks, and low education achievement levels.

While YES grew out of the MSS Regionally Initiated Special Employment (RISE) program in 1992, it has been undergoing transformation and change every year since it began. The program's goal is to assist youth receiving income assistance and Youth in Care to achieve independence by providing projects to address their education, training and employment needs in order to obtain further education or available employment. Its objective is to assist youth in achieving independence by providing harm reduction supports and increasing access to training opportunities, education and work experience opportunities.

YES programming is provided through contracted agencies in communities, who obtain YES funding to cover expenses incurred in developing and running projects. Eligible expenses include course or training costs, overhead costs (staff wages and benefits, training for participants), capital costs relevant to the project, and / or wage subsidies for youth in the projects.

The target group for the program has been identified as youth with any of the following characteristics:

³ Youth Employment Skills Program Evaluation RFP, August 23, 1995, p. 12.

- Youth ages 15-24, in receipt of income assistance
- Youth in Care
- Youth in the "Children in Home of a Relative" Program
- Youth who are the dependents of someone in receipt of Income Assistance
- Youth in receipt of Handicap Benefits

The program budget for YES was \$4.0 million for the 1993/94 and 1994/95 fiscal years, and \$6.29 million for the 1995/96 fiscal year. The estimated average number of projects funded annually is 75, providing programming and services to approximately 3,000 participants.

1.2 Scope of the evaluation and structure of the report

The questions identified in the original Request for Proposals were grouped in six broad categories. Where possible, these categories have been used in structuring this report and the study findings. Of course, the questions are not mutually exclusive, and in many cases trying to answer one question or group of questions involves first reporting the results from another group of questions. For example, the sixth question grouping asks about the key elements of a successful YES project. But answering questions about the factors that contribute to success depends on clarifying the definition of success, which is something dealt with in examining the first two issue groupings about objectives achievement and consistency with government mandate. This report structure also allows us to address the range of contingent variables that are inevitably discovered in conducting a study of this magnitude. In some cases we have cross-referenced the discussions in an effort to make the analysis and reporting of findings clearer.

The six broad question groupings for the study were:

1. *Is the YES program achieving its goals and objectives? Are youth getting jobs, going on to further education, receiving training, obtaining necessary harm reduction supports, etc.*
2. *Is the YES program consistent with the priorities of the Government, and is it responding to the mandate of the Ministry and Division? Are program activities consistent with a pro-active approach to assisting youth to move from income assistance toward long term employment?*
3. *Are the intended impacts of the YES program being produced effectively and efficiently? What are completion rates and average costs per participant? Are projects reflecting and responsive to the needs of communities? Do participants feel that the program provides them with the supports they want and need?*

4. *How is the YES program being managed and delivered at the program and project levels? How are referrals done? What project activities are provided? What are the roles and responsibilities of Ministry staff and contractors, and are they clearly understood and communicated? What linkages are occurring with communities and interested stakeholders such as the Youth in Care Network and MSS?*
5. *What is the level and extent of youth involvement in the YES program? Are contracts receiving BC Youth in Care Network and CYC validation? What types of project administration and delivery activities are youth participating in?*
6. *What are the elements of a successful YES project? What are some of the project elements common to effective and successful projects? What are the Best Practices?*

One additional issue was requested for closer examination after the study began; examining the different needs of youth 15-18 from those 19-24. It also encompassed reviewing the different types and levels of participation of youth of different ages. This has been addressed by the study, and is described in section 3.4.1.

Sections three through six of the report address the evaluation questions that have guided the study. Appendix A provides some general recommendations that complement the specific suggestions included in the best practices sections of the report. Appendix B gives a more detailed summary of some of the key methodological issues dealt with in the course of conducting the research. Appendix C provides a short answer summary of the main evaluation questions from the RFP with results obtained through the evaluation.

1.3 A note on the context of the evaluation

One of the early discoveries about the way the program had been administered over the years was that the range of YES projects changed little year to year. While with the Ministry of Social Services, and as the program grew out of the RISE YES contracts were automatically renewed if they were perceived to still be meeting the needs of youth, there had been no significant problems with the projects, and if the project was still continuing to fill seats in their programs. It is not clear what type of monitoring of projects was taking place. Based on comments from Training Consultants, contractors, MSS staff and managers, contract administration tended to consist of a direct and often informal relationship between field staff and contractors, encompassing developing the project, processing the contract, providing support in getting it operational, and keeping track of what it was doing and how it was helping youth. Many individuals referred to how contracts were

administered "off the sides of their desks," and depending on the role of the individual we talked to, this was either a good thing or a troublesome one.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study involved extensive primary data collection through surveys of past and current program participants, project contractors, Ministry Training Consultants, MSS Social Workers and Financial Assistance Workers, employers who provided work placements, managers and administrative staff within the Ministry, and other community stakeholders -- particularly those interested in the welfare of youth on IA or Youth in Care. Just under 500 interviews were conducted, most by telephone. Site visits were made to five projects, and on-site discussions were held with some youth who were unreachable by telephone, particularly those involved with projects of a more outreach or less structured nature. File and administrative data were also reviewed.

The surveys done for this evaluation contributed a wealth of detail and anecdotal information relevant to most of the key evaluation issues. The surveys of participants and the comparison group were to provide outcome data allowing the evaluators to contrast different types of project activities, contributing to our understanding of what works best, in what situations, and for whom. The outcome data turned out to be less robust than we had hoped, in part because of the limited information available from the MSS database, and in part because of inconsistencies in key variables when we contrasted responses of contractors and participants. Still, the surveys did address outcome issues, allowing us to identify best practices for program content, and more importantly, to compare the identified effective program elements with what contractors and Ministry staff perceive to be most effective and worthwhile. The surveys of different respondent groups were designed with several common questions so that we could compare responses on key issues. This proved to be very effective, particularly with comparisons between Training Consultants, MSS staff and Contractors.

2.1 Methodological implications of the evaluation context

Four factors significantly affected the process and timing of how the evaluation was conducted. First, the transfer of the YES program from the Ministry of Social Services to the Ministry of Skills, Training and Labour affected the identification of projects and the subsequent selection of the samples of projects and participants. Some of the administrative records were never located, and were thus not available for the study, and information systems were in the process of being updated and revised. This created logistical challenges that affected the timing of data collection.

A second factor that followed on the heels of the transfer was the new Request for Proposal (RFP) process that was introduced across the province. This created a shifting target for the evaluation, as contractors and Ministry staff could have been

talking about quite different contract development systems and policies only weeks apart, or even concurrently if we were talking with people in different regions of the province. The RFP process changed significantly over the course of the study. It continues to be adapted.

Third, the government introduced BC Benefits just prior to the start of data collection with external informants. Youth Works had an impact on both the program and the evaluation. In the field, the introduction of Youth Works affected how YES was administered, including the continuance of existing contracts. It became a topic of discussion even when we were pointedly trying not to discuss it with informants. Despite our concerted efforts, informants did discuss the BC Benefits initiative, and some of the findings of these discussions are clearly relevant to this evaluation.

Fourth, the Ministry of Skills, Training and Labour was combined with the Ministry of Education to create the new Ministry of Education, Skills and Training in the course of the evaluation. While this change had minimal impact on the administration of the program as far as the evaluation was concerned, it did have an impact on the availability of staff for interviews.

2.2 Information sources

As noted above, the study involved the review of administrative records, telephone surveys, unstructured interviews and site visits with several groups of informants. Details about specific sources of information and surveys are summarized below, and discussion of how the project and participant samples were developed is provided in Appendix B.

1. Administrative records

The administrative records that were to be the starting point for the YES evaluation turned out to be a source of difficulty for the study early on, particularly in trying to develop the sample of projects and participants. The transition of the YES program from MSS to MSTL in part coincided with decisions to centralize and then decentralize program records and files. Based on initial spreadsheets with information about YES projects that were provided by headquarters staff, we initially developed a list of 75 active projects.⁴ Through discussions with regional

⁴ Most contractors referred to their projects as "their programs." In this report, we have used the terminology as follows: The YES program has funded approximately 100 projects across the province. Each project has had one or more contracts, and each contract could refer to one or more intakes. A project is a specific set of activities provided by a contracting agency over a period of time. A contract is the legal and financial basis for purchasing the program or service from the contractor or agency. An intake refers to how the participants take part in a project -- some have one point of intake for which participants enroll and undertake jointly with other youth. Others have continuous intake over a period of time, with a maximum

administration staff, examining records in head office, and locating spreadsheets from previous years, we expanded this list to 99 projects that had been active between 1993 and the fall of 1995.

A purposive sample of 40 projects was developed based on the list of 99 projects. The sample was based on selecting a cross section of projects that reflected the range and distribution of project types across the province. Key variables on which the projects were selected included: type of contractor; number of participants; dollar value of the project; average cost per participant; region of the province; duration of the project experience; and the actual activities provided and undertaken by participants. More detailed information was then collected from administrative files for these projects, primarily by examining contracts, proposals. This sample of projects became the basis for sampling participants and contractors for the surveys.

2. Participant surveys

Thirty of the 40 projects selected for the study provided participant names to the evaluation team. Successful interviews were conducted with participants from each of these 30 projects with the range being from 1 interview (for a project that had only one participant), to 32 interviews from one project. In total, 270 past participant interviews were completed, and 82 interviews with current participants. Based on initial participant lists of 1,326 names from the 30 responding contractors (1,090 past participant and 236 current participant), this represents a survey response rate of 26.6%. The respective response rates for the past and current participant surveys were 24.8% and 34.7%. A particular barrier to achieving a higher response rate for this survey was that many of the youth did not have telephones, either when they were in projects, or at present. Many of the names given on the participant lists by contractors did not include telephone numbers or other contacts for the participants, and often the contractor was listed as the main point of contact person.

For several projects that provided an outreach kind of service to young people who were either on the street or in some other form of unstable living situation, we were able to complete interviews by having the participants (and in some cases past participants) telephone our offices collect from contractor's offices. For several other projects, site visits were made in an attempt to contact youth who were not accessible by telephone. In one case, we were able to attend a scheduled meeting involving participating youth and discuss the project and the youths' views on the program. It is important to realize when examining results of the participant surveys that projects providing an outreach component or variable intake / flexible delivery of short-term intervention have been under-represented. Anecdotal information, site visits and a few interviews cannot completely address the absence of representation of participants from these projects in the survey component of the study.

number of concurrent participants. In either case, the intake refers to the time during which the project takes place, before a new contract or session begins.

One additional interesting facet of the participant survey was the Ministry's requirement that the evaluator hire YES eligible youth as part of the evaluation team. Seven young people were hired as telephone interviewers for the participant surveys, and five of them were program eligible. The young people learned quickly and conducted quality interviews that were well-recorded. They also contributed important insights to the project in the final crafting and testing of the interview schedule. Through their ability to relate well to the respondents over the telephone, these young people likely increased the response rate for the surveys. Further, their success in tackling difficult work and addressing their tasks with both enthusiasm and creativity have contributed to our understanding of how to facilitate more and improved youth participation in decision-making for youth programming.

3. Training Consultant survey

The sample for the survey of Training Consultants (TCs) was developed by speaking with Area Managers, Skills BC Coordinators and other Training Consultants, and asking who had experience with the YES program either through referrals to projects or by doing contract development or administration. A total of thirty one interviews were completed with TCs across all five regions.

4. Survey of MSS Social Workers and Financial Assistance Workers

The sample of Social Workers and Financial Assistance Workers was developed using a modified snowball sampling technique via the Training Consultant Survey. TCs were asked who their main contacts in MSS were, and who we should talk to in that Ministry. A total of 14 interviews with some Social Workers, and mostly Financial Assistance workers were completed.

5. Contractor survey

We attempted to interview all contractors in our group of 40 selected projects. A total of 39 interviews were conducted with representatives from 35 of the projects. For six of the projects we conducted separate interviews with more than one person from the project, as they had different information to provide and roles in administering or running the projects. For several other projects we interviewed more than one person simultaneously about the project.

6. Employer survey

We conducted interviews with employers involved with five different projects that involved a work experience or placement component with local employers (one in each Ministry region). A total of 20 employer interviews were conducted, asking questions about the relationship with the contractor, perspectives on the benefits to

the youth involved with the placement, satisfaction with participation and the process through which participants were selected for placement with the employer.

7. Managers and administrators

A selection of Regional Managers, Skills BC Coordinators, Area Managers and other administrative staff involved with the program were interviewed. Approximately 20 individuals provided information on current and past practices through unstructured and semi-structured interviews.

8. Other stakeholders

Initial discussions with those representing Youth interests found that questions about the YES program were often inappropriate -- the individuals could speak to youth employment issues, and were pleased to speak about Youth Works and the recent changes to Income Assistance benefits for young people, but they did not know enough about YES and how it worked to be able to speak to many of the evaluation issues. Still, a few interviews were conducted, including with individuals involved with Child and Youth Committees, and their comments strongly echoed those of participants, contractors and many of the Training Consultants.

3. THE YES PROGRAM MANDATE, GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

This section of the report starts the presentation of study results. A key group of questions for the evaluation were related to how well the YES program is meeting its goal and objectives, and whether it is consistent with the mandate and priorities of government and the Ministry. Prior to presenting results and findings, it is both appropriate and necessary to revisit the program's goal, objectives and mandate.

According to the RFP for this evaluation project, the goal of the Youth Employment Skills program is to:

"assist youth receiving income assistance and Youth in Care to achieve independence by providing projects to address their education, training and employment needs in order to obtain further education or available employment."⁵

The objective of YES is to assist youth in achieving independence by:

- providing harm reduction support
- increasing access to training opportunities
- increasing access to education, and
- increasing work experience opportunities and enhancing employment retention⁶

The provincial government's perspective on youth issues and income assistance was expressed to proponents as:

"... the renewal of the social security system, for youth in particular, should include forms of support other than purely financial assistance. It should be designed to provide people with incentives to work, and it should be oriented to helping those most in need."⁷

Further context provided to the proponent concerning the Skills Development Division's Training and Employability (T&E) Branch noted that:

"T&E programs and services focus on assisting clients to strengthen their employability skills, as defined by the Conference Board of Canada, thereby increasing employability potential. The programs further strive to link personal goals and aspirations with training and long-term job opportunities. Success for the T&E programs is defined as the degree to which IARs successfully proceed through the

⁵ Youth Employment Skills Program Evaluation RFP, August 23, 1995, p. 13.

⁶ RFP, p. 14.

⁷ RFP, p. 11.

"building blocks" towards employment, and ultimately by the extent to which they secure long-term attachment to the workforce."⁸

Several key points need to be drawn from the above program context of government priorities and mandate to facilitate the discussion in the next section of the report. First, the broader program context is one of a shift from passive forms of support to active measures, with an expectation of active labour market search on the part of those receiving income assistance. This precedes and is consistent with the subsequent introduction of Youth Works.

Second, programs, services and active measures are intended to be targeted to those most in need of assistance, with the expectation that those most capable of achieving employment without help would do so. Providing harm reduction supports was clearly intended to be part of the YES program's method and approach.

Third, the definition of success for T&E programs and services implies a graduated continuum of success, with clients taking active steps towards and moving closer to employment, with employment and financial independence a long-term outcome.

3.1 YES program goal, mandate and the gap in services

Support for the goal of the YES program was universally high. Over 80% of Training Consultants felt that YES was meeting its official goal, and over 90% felt that the goal was still appropriate. Over 90% of Social Workers and Financial Assistance Workers felt that the program was meeting its goal and that the goal was appropriate.

Similar support for the goal of YES was expressed by contractors, with a significant caveat. While over 95% felt that the goal was appropriate, a significant portion -- over half -- expressed strong views that the program goal was too narrow. Contractors expanded on these comments through the questions dealing with improvements to participants' employability and the program's mandate.

Many contractors felt that the project activities considered appropriate for moving people toward employment were becoming more rigidly defined, and increasingly focused on immediate employment at the expense of long term labour market attachment. They felt that the program was starting to "cream" those most employment-ready, leaving a significant gap in service for those youth who were more marginal in their labour market attachment, or who did not adequately fit the criteria for program participation (such as street youth who were not officially on IA).

⁸ RFP, p. 12.

Some staff and management within the Ministry echoed these concerns. They felt that the Ministry had "... gone too far in focusing on the numbers, and getting people off welfare *versus* giving them the help they need." As one staff member put it, the program, and the projects of many contractors, "used to have too much emphasis on 'warm fuzzies,' but now the program has gone too far the other way." Others within the Ministry welcomed the recent focus on accountability and a tighter employment focus for the program, feeling that many projects lacked well-defined employment goals, and focused too strongly on long-term life skills and harm reduction for clients who were a long way from being employable.⁹

This ongoing debate about YES was addressed by most staff and managers in the Ministry, and some MSS staff. Most acknowledged a gap in services to youth at the lower end of the continuum of employability, and noted that this reflected shifts in project and project activity selection policies by MSTL after the program was transferred from MSS. Harm reduction was a significant component of the program when it was at MSS. When YES was transferred to MSTL it retained (as it still does) an articulated objective of using harm reduction supports as a means of helping those most in need and furthest from being employable. However, the general consensus of MSTL staff and managers (including head office and corporate staff) has been that the Ministry is in the business of supporting skill training, and not harm reduction. It was articulated by several staff that "harm reduction support is the responsibility of MSS, and we shouldn't be doing it." Indeed, several staff noted that this issue has been the basis for a consistent set of rumours within the Ministry since YES was transferred -- that the program was going to be transferred back to MSS "very soon." Two staff members even offered the evaluators assurances that this transfer would be announced prior to the completion of the evaluation study.

Another facet of this shift in program focus has been the introduction of new official criteria for project success: typically 75% of participants completing projects, and 70% of completers in training, education or 10 weeks of employment within six months.¹⁰ Some contractors expressed an unwillingness to be held accountable to what they considered to be "unrealistic and inappropriate criteria." The survey questions concerning whether full-time employment was a reasonable goal for participants highlighted this issue well. Contractors actually were more likely to agree with this possibility than either Training Consultants or MSS staff. But for all

⁹ "Harm reduction support" refers to a variety of supports that address youth participant needs that relate to their ability take part in and take advantage of other project activities. Supports include: internal personal or group counselling, referral to external counselling or supports, help in resolving living situation problems, and counselling or activities related to dealing with specific issues, such as dealing with authority, and life skills.

¹⁰ In discussions with staff and contractors, many variations of this requirement were heard, ranging from 70% to 80% completion rate, and 70% to 85% placement rate. In actual practice, schedule A's from contracts showed a range of 50% to 100% for completion, and 25% to 100% for placement. Averages: 74.5% completion, 71.7% placement (n=37).

groups, over half (and for TCs two thirds) disagreed with the statement, "Full-time employment is a reasonable goal for most YES participants." The participant surveys showed completion rates to be quite in line with Ministry expectations (the average respondent completion rate was 75%). Post-program placement rates appear to be slightly lower than the targets set by the Ministry, but it varies based on the type of project and activity.¹¹

The unintended consequences of high target success criteria for contractors are twofold. First, when contractors are evaluated on the basis of completion rates and outcomes, those projects that cater to the high end client who is already close to being job-ready will tend to be more likely to receive repeat funding. Second, contractors will become more selective about the participants they accept into their projects in order to increase their likelihood of achieving targets. In both cases, high target success criteria result in a higher probability of projects "creaming" clients who are the most job-ready. Anecdotal evidence from the contractor and youth stakeholder surveys indicate this has been happening with the YES program. The issue is worth reviewing in more detail, as such impacts are counter to the broad mandate for youth programming articulated by government and identified at the start of this section -- having programs "oriented to helping those most in need." It also contributes to the creation of a gap in services.

One final observation about the gap in services to youth relates to the views of youth on what they need and when they need it. Site visits were done for several projects that emphasized "harm reduction" supports, and for which telephone surveys could not be conducted. The youth at these projects would not be likely to access the higher-end, formalized projects that are increasingly the type funded by the Ministry. Yet the participants expressed both a strong interest in obtaining employment, and very clearly articulated appreciation for the value of harm reduction supports in helping them become more employable.

3.2 Objectives achievement

This section describes information about participants' post-program activities in several ways. Respondents were asked 1) what activities they had *ever* undertaken since the project, 2) what activities they undertook in the *first year* after the project, 3) the *first activity* they undertook after completing the project, and 4) their *current activities*. Participants' activities during the project are also described in this section.

¹¹ It should be noted that the contractors and staff surveys reflected current program activities and program status. The past participant surveys reflected projects as they were 1-1/2 to 2 years ago. Some of the projects for which participants were surveyed are no longer active -- they have been cut through the new RFP process, in some cases because of their emphasis on harm reduction activities.

According to contractors, staff and youth participants, YES has been effective in helping youth move from assistance to employment, training or further education. Evidence from the survey of participants supports these views, as participation in various types of project activities tends to be associated with higher levels of post-program employment, training and education. Another source of evidence on this issues was a question put to those youth who were employed at the time of the survey. When asked whether they would have the job if they had not participated in their YES project, just over 50% said that they would not.

The surveys of contractors, Training Consultants and MSS staff asked directly if the YES program has been effective in increasing youths' employability, and the latter two surveys also asked if it has helped youth to achieve independence and attachment to the workforce. Responses to these questions are displayed in Table One below.

TABLE ONE: Views on YES Objectives Achievement				
Questions		Training Consultants n=31	MSS Staff n=14	Contractors n=39
Has YES been effective in increasing youth's employability?	Yes	93.3%	84.6%	97.4%
	No	6.7%	15.4%	2.6%
	Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Has YES helped youth to achieve independence and attachment to the workforce? ¹²	Yes	76.7%	84.6%	--
	No	23.3%	15.4%	--
	Total	100.0%	100.0%	

In the YES participant surveys, about half of respondents thought that the project contributed a lot to their ability to find work, and another third thought it made some contribution. About 37% of respondents thought that the project contributed a lot to their ability to access educational upgrading, and a further 31% thought it made some contribution.

¹² It is important to appreciate that sometimes respondents' perspectives on "success" for a project were based on fairly loose criteria. For example, one FAW explained that "yes the project has been successful -- one of the sixteen participants was employed after the project."

From the perspective of the success criteria that the program has been introducing since the transfer from MSS, the majority (89%) of respondents to the past participant survey were involved in either paid employment, educational pursuits (upgrading or completion), or skill training since participating in the project. Almost 83% were involved in one or more of the three types of activity in the first year after the project. While some individual projects had lower rates of placement in employment, they tended to also have more participants involved in education or skill training after the project. None of the projects (with at least five respondents) had less than 60% either in employment, education or training.

Activities ever undertaken since the project

The breakdown of post-program activities ever undertaken since the YES program for respondents to the past participant survey is as follows:

- Paid employment (full or part-time) -- 66%
- Educational upgrading -- 49%
- Skill training -- 37%
- Volunteer employment -- 34%
- Other job preparation / training program -- 25%

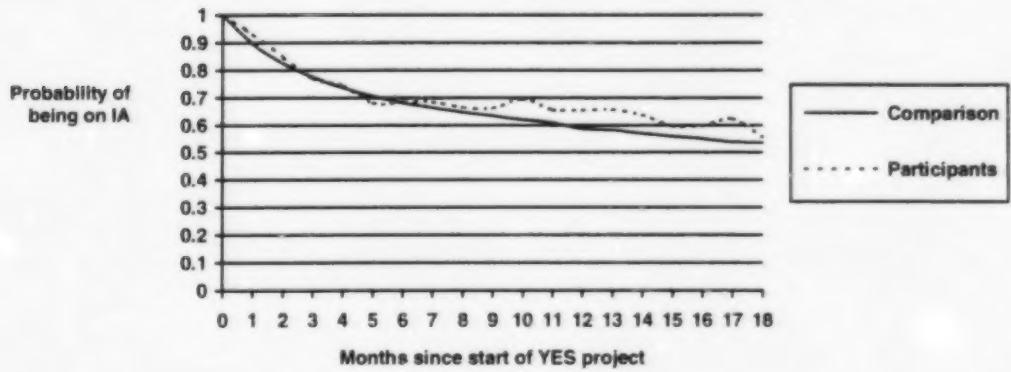
Using the MSS administrative database, the post-program Income Assistance history of a sample of YES participants was compared to the history of all other IA recipients with comparable characteristics (selected on the basis of such variables as age, sex, marital status, and employability rating). At best, the findings are inconclusive. Participants were marginally less likely to be off IA than the comparison group about a year and a half after beginning their YES projects. Figure One below shows the comparison over time.¹³

¹³

The limitations on this data are significant. The MSS database did not identify "Youth in Care" or those who were eligible for YES because they lived in a home where a parent or guardian was on IA. Further, only about a quarter of the sample included Social Insurance Number information that could allow us to locate the individual in the database, so there are sampling biases that could not be corrected for.

The time variable is from the start of YES participation, and so does not take into account the differential duration of YES programs. The latter is critical, as some participants were in their projects for over six months, and were on IA for the duration of their projects.

Figure One: Income Assistance history for YES participants and a comparison group



Activities undertaken in the first year after participation

Approximately half of respondents were employed full-time at some point in the year after participation in YES, and almost 40% were involved in educational upgrading or completing schooling. Just under two-thirds of respondents spent some time in the first year after the project being unemployed and actively seeking work.

Activities undertaken by respondents in their first year after the program included:¹⁴

- Unemployed and seeking work -- 63%
 - ◊ average duration of unemployment, 24 weeks
 - ◊ one quarter of the 63% for 8 months or more
- School / educational upgrading -- 39%
 - ◊ average duration of education, 30 weeks
 - ◊ almost half of the 39% for six months or more
- Full-time employment -- 50%
 - ◊ average duration of employment, 26 weeks
 - ◊ over one in ten of the 50% for the full year
- Part-time employment -- 29%
 - ◊ average duration of part-time employment, 16 weeks
- Skill or job preparation training -- 17%
 - ◊ average duration of training, 13 weeks

First activity after participating in YES

While two-thirds of participants have had paid employment since the project, most were not able to obtain employment immediately. About 36% of participants were employed either full or part-time right after the project, and almost 60% within the first year.

The first activity undertaken after the program by the 270 YES past-participants who responded to the survey included:¹⁵

- Unemployed and seeking work -- 29%
 - ◊ average duration of unemployment, 23 weeks
 - ◊ half of the 29% for three months or longer
- Full-time employment -- 26%
 - ◊ average duration of employment, 31 weeks
 - ◊ two-thirds of the 26% for three months or longer

¹⁴ Includes multiple activities, so totals do not add up to 100%.

¹⁵ Total does not come to 100% due to rounding.

- Other (childcare, maternity, illness, volunteer work, etc.) -- 14%
- School / educational upgrading -- 13%
 - ◊ average duration of time in education, 35 weeks
 - ◊ two-thirds of the 13% for six months or longer
- Part-time employment -- 10%
- Out of labour force -- 6%
- Skill Training -- 3%

Current activities of participants

The past participant survey also asked about respondents' current activities. It is interesting to compare current activity to first activities undertaken after the project. The proportion of participants with full-time employment is the same, the proportion unemployed has fallen 5%, and the proportion in school has risen by 6%. The latter is a particularly interesting finding, because some of the participants were in part-time projects that enabled them to be in school at the same time, and thus we would expect some to still be in school immediately after the project.

The current activities of past YES participants:

- Full-time employment -- 26%
- Unemployed and seeking work -- 24%
- School / educational upgrading -- 19%
- Part-time employment -- 11%
- Other (childcare, maternity, illness, volunteer work, etc.) -- 11%
- Out of labour force -- 5%
- Skill Training -- 4%

For the past participants who were employed at the time of the survey (n=106), on average they worked approximately 33 hours per week (a third for 40 hours per week, and 69% for 30 or more hours per week), made on average \$9.34 per hour (41% made \$7.00 per hour or less, and three quarters made \$10.00 per hour or less), and 60% were satisfied with the future work options of the job.

Past participants found employment in a diverse range of occupations, although the majority tended to be relatively elemental service occupations. The occupational distribution of participants employed at the time of the survey is described below:

<i>NOC</i>	<i>Percent</i>	
<i>Occupational grouping</i>	<i>of participants major group</i>	
• food service and kitchen help	17.9%	66

• other sales and service (waiting tables, etc.)	13.2%	64
• retail sales positions	13.2%	64
• cooking	12.3%	62
• intermediate transport and material handling	9.4%	74
• forestry and logging	8.5%	84/86
• clerical workers	6.5%	14
• social services occupations	6.5%	41
• manufacturing and product fabrication	4.7%	94
• other skilled or semi-professional positions	3.8%	21/22/51
• skilled trades (carpentry, etc.)	2.7%	72

Activities undertaken during program participation

Harm reduction and other supports were perceived by participants as extremely beneficial by those who received them. Table Two below provides a ranking of project activities based on their usefulness to participants (average rating on a scale of: 1 = very useful, 2 = fairly useful, 3 = a little useful, and 4 = not at all useful):

TABLE TWO: Usefulness Ranking of Project Activities by Participants	
Activity and Usefulness Ranking	Average Rating
1. Help finding a place to live	1.37
2. Work experience opportunities	1.52
3. Support during a crisis	1.54
4. Help writing a resume	1.55
5. Training for a specific job	1.60
6. Help in knowing how to keep a job	1.62
7. Training in communication skills	1.63
8. Help accessing further education	1.67
9. Help from a mentor	1.67
10. Training in specific skills	1.68
11. Help in job search	1.71
12. Pay while training or learning	1.75
13. Information on types of jobs	1.78
14. Help in developing a training plan	1.82
15. Personal counselling	1.83
16. Training in how to solve problems	1.83

The activities judged to be most useful were sometimes those that fewer participants received. For example, "Help finding a place to live" was rated as the most useful assistance provided to participants, but only 20% of participants in the survey had this type of assistance (and gave a usefulness ranking for this item). On the other hand, some activities such as crisis counselling were near the bottom of both lists. The most common activities provided were help in writing a resume, information on the kinds of jobs there are, and help with the participant's job search.

Table Three provides a ranking of the percentage of participants having each type of activity in their YES projects:

TABLE THREE: Percent of Participants Doing Project Activities	
Activity	Percent
1. Help writing a resume	82%
2. Information on jobs	81%
3. Help in job search	80%
4. Training in communication skills	77%
5. Training in problem solving	75%
6. Help in developing a training plan	65%
7. Help in keeping a job	63%
8. Help accessing further education	63%
9. Pay while training or learning	59%
10. Help from a mentor	57%
11. Personal counselling	55%
12. Work experience	49%
13. Training in specific skills	45%
14. Support during a crisis	45%
15. Training for a specific job	36%
16. Help finding a place to live	20%

Just under half of participants stated that they received some form of work experience in their projects, although the projects for three-quarters of the participants were supposed to provide some form of work experience. This may reflect people dropping out of their projects, or the fact that some projects did not provide work experience opportunities for all participants -- only those who were "ready for the experience or for whom a placement could be found." On the other hand, a quarter of the participants who said they had a work experience component

to their project were in projects that did not officially have a work experience component.

It appears that what a participant or contractor considers to be work experience encompasses a very wide and diverse range of activities, from job shadowing, any hands-on experience, full or part-time voluntary employment or community service, make work projects, to real work in actual job settings. The latter appears to be what participants are most interested in. Almost two-thirds of participants felt that getting work experience from the project was very important, and another 20% felt that it was fairly important. Getting a job was the only thing that participants hoped for from a project more than some work experience. Just under 10% of participants commented that the main thing they would like to change about the project was to add or expand the work experience component of the project.

Skill training of some sort was another project activity that participants expressed significantly more interest in than what they received in actual project activities. Over half identified skill training or preparation for a specific job to be a very important hoped for benefit from participating in YES, and over 75% felt it was either very important or fairly important. Less than 50% of participants stated that they actually obtained skill training in their projects, and this percentage overestimates the amount of skill training that was provided because many participants included such items as training in communication skills (16%) and interview preparation (8%) as skill training that they obtained in the project. The majority of projects did not provide a specific or significant (longer than a couple of weeks duration) skill training component to their project activities, and those that did were often limited to first aid training, basic computer skills training, or introduction to office skills. A significant exception involved projects that provided an introduction to food service skills, including "food safe," "serving it right," and "superhost" training. Just under a third of respondents said that the training they were hoping to obtain was the same as the training they received through the project.

Other significant activities and benefits mentioned by participants included having opportunities to socialize and meet people, gaining self confidence and self-esteem, having peer support, and opportunities for physical fitness and recreation.

3.3 Efficiency and effectiveness of objectives achievement and impacts

One intended impact that relates to the program's effectiveness and efficiency is the appropriateness of the work experience and skill training being provided. As noted above, participants have expressed interest in having more work experience and skill training opportunities. Further, many of the opportunities they obtained through the program were not directly relevant to their personal or local employment possibilities. Concrete work experience that provides opportunities in real jobs with real employers was identified as most beneficial by participants. The employer

survey supported this conclusion in that 95% of employers surveyed agreed that hosting a work placement was a useful way of recruiting a potential long-term employee.

While most of the skill training opportunities participants had were in lower to medium skill areas, this is perhaps a reasonable expectation for projects. Most of the skill training was relevant to entry level or service sector employment, which is widespread across the different regions of the province, and also provides less chance that participants are competing directly with other higher skilled or experienced individuals who do not have comparable employment barriers. Further, what is usually considered a negative side of this type of work -- the high turnover rate in service sector employment -- can actually work in favour of those trying to break into the workforce and get some real job experience, as the number of jobs in this sector is high, and a high proportion come vacant on a regular basis.

A key issue affecting the efficiency of the YES program at this time is the unintended impact of the new contracting processes, discussed more fully in section 4. Linkages among contractors have been weakened, and opportunities for appropriate ladderling between programs have been reduced due to an increasing homogeneity of contracts. On the other hand, because of the "creaming" of clients closer to being job-ready, the changes are likely to increase the completion rate of projects and the proportion of completers who are moving on to appropriate and intended post-program activities such as employment, further education, or training.

The balance of this section provides a basic statistical summary of participants in YES projects (a profile of survey respondents), project characteristics, and project activities.

3.3.1 YES participant (respondent) profile

This section of the report provides a brief statistical overview and description of YES participants who responded to the survey. The majority of respondents were part of the official target group for the program, although just over 3% appear to have been older than 24 years of age. Examination of administrative data from MSS indicate that some participants in YES projects were not in receipt of Income Assistance at the time of their participation in the program. More detail concerning the breakdown of participant status with regard to Income Assistance categories was not yet available at the time this report was prepared. Other characteristics of participants:

- Age while in the project:

15	5.2%	45.5%	19	16.7%	54.5%
16	8.6%		20	11.8%	

17 18.2%
18 13.5%

21 8.9%
22 7.2%
23 3.7%
24 2.9%
25+ 3.2%

- Approximately 75% of respondents completed the project
- 50% male, and 50% female
- 15% belong to an ethnic or visible minority group
 - ◊ two thirds of this group were First Nations persons
- Marital status:
 - ◊ Single (never married) (88%),
 - ◊ Married or common-law (12%),
 - ◊ Separated or divorced (1%).
- 18% presently have children under their care (this figure reflects the timing of the survey a year after the project; the proportion of participants with children under their care during the project was lower, likely less than 10%)

Table Five describes participants' most hoped-for benefit from the program. It ranks benefits by rating their average importance to participants: 1 = very important, 2 = fairly important, 3 = a little important, and 4 = not at all important.

TABLE FIVE: How Participants Were Hoping to Benefit From the YES Program	
Benefit and Importance Ranking	Average Rating
1. a job	1.33
2. work experience	1.63
3. more education	1.65
4. specific work skills	1.81
5. learning how to find a job	1.84
6. something to put on a resume	1.86
7. making a plan for what I want to do	1.98
8. preparing for a specific job	2.01
9. help writing a resume	2.05
10. learning about kinds of jobs	2.14

11. getting paid while training or learning	2.18
12. help with personal problems	2.54

Below is a different way of describing the distribution of the top five items rated as the most important hoped-for-benefits from the program by participants:

1. a job	77% very important, 93% fairly important ¹⁶
2. work experience	63% very important, 84% fairly important
3. getting more education	63% very important, 81% fairly important
4. specific work skills	50% very important, 78% fairly important
5. learning how to find a job	48% very important, 78% fairly important

• Highest level of education when in the project:

1. Less than grade 10	19%
2. grade 10	32%
3. grade 11	21%
4. grade 12	7%
5. HS diploma	13%
6. GED	1%
7. trade	1%
8. some college	3%
9. college diploma	3%
10. private college	1%
11. some university	1%

3.3.2 Profile of YES projects

Forty projects were selected for examination in this study out of approximately 99 identified. The projects were selected to be representative of the range of projects on such variables as length of intervention, cost per participant, type of activity, region of the province, and type of contractor. Interviews were conducted with participants from 30 of the 40 projects, and with staff from 35 of the contracting agencies. This summary uses information from the contractor surveys and from Schedule A and B sections of contract files obtained from the Ministry. The purposive sampling of projects that was done has given the evaluators a good sense that the summary information about contracts is fairly representative of the range of YES projects.

¹⁶ In this summary, "very important" refers to the percent of respondents indicating that the item was a very important hoped-for-benefit, and "fairly important" refers to the proportion of respondents who indicated that the item was *either* very or fairly important.

The 40 projects represent contracts¹⁷ valued at a total of \$3,391,083.10, with an average contract cost of \$84,777.08. The contracts provided services to approximately 2,000 participants, with an average cost per participant of \$1,691.31, and an average cost per participant per week of project time of approximately \$126.00.¹⁸ The range of contract size among the selected projects was from \$13,000.00 to \$360,000.00, and the range in average cost per participant was from under \$200.00 to \$16,000.00 for an eight month work experience and skill training project that had one participant. The number of participants in a project ranged from 1 (one) to 180. The latter number may be low from the perspective of projects that had more than one contract in a year, or significant contract extensions. The average number of participants in a project was 50.1, and the average number participating in a project at one time was 16.4 participants. Eighty-five percent of projects had 20 or fewer participants involved in the project at any one point in time. The average duration of a YES project for a participant was just under 15 weeks, and the range was from about a week (short-term and outreach projects) to a full year (52 weeks). The average time in work experience was just under three weeks. Those projects with a work experience component usually had it for a minimum three weeks duration (there was one exception of a two week work experience), and the range was up to 40 weeks.

The sample of projects with which interviews with respondents were obtained was slightly different than the full range of projects. Outreach, part-time and shorter duration projects that had an immediate and flexible impact on youth were difficult to survey, and in some cases no participant names were obtained. For some of these projects the study conducted site visits in lieu of doing telephone interviews. Table Six below contrasts the characteristics of the 40 sampled projects and those for which at least one interview was conducted.

TABLE SIX: Summary of Project Characteristics		
Project characteristics (averages)	All 40 sampled projects	30 projects with completed interviews
Project cost per participant	\$1,691	\$2,004

¹⁷ It is important to note that the information here is from contracts, and not projects over the complete fiscal year. Many of the contracts were for the entire year, and covered numerous sessions. Others were contracts for six months or less, which were often extended one or more times. We used the base contracts for our calculations, for they had the most complete information, and provided our best chance at computing accurate cost per client figures.

¹⁸ Based on projected participation levels from Schedule A's of contracts. Actual participation levels may have been different, in some cases lower. This would have increased the actual average cost per participant in the program.

Cost per participant per week	\$126	\$148
Number of participants	50	50
Number participants at one time	16.4	17.1
Duration of project (weeks)	14.8	15.4
Duration of work experience (weeks)	2.9	3.6

For some of the projects, interviews were conducted, but for only a small number of participants compared to those from larger and more structured projects. In other words, the response rate was significantly lower for this type of project. This led to a significant difference in the characteristics of respondents to the surveys compared to the typical YES participant. For example, the average cost per participant for the respondents to the surveys was \$3,123.09, and the average cost per participant per week of programming was \$154.91. Similarly, the average project duration was longer for those participants surveyed for the study: 23.5 weeks on average, with 6-1/2 weeks of work experience. It thus can be expected that the participant outcomes for survey respondents overstate the success of the program in so far as such factors as project duration and work experience contribute to post-program activities.

3.4 Consistency of YES mandate with needs of youth

A key issue for many survey respondents was the impact of the change in program mandate to a stronger employment focus. This section addresses the ongoing debate among contractors and Ministry staff concerning the level of harm reduction support that participants need, and the appropriateness of the Ministry's expectations concerning post-program employment and education.

Perceptions of youth needs

Contractors' estimates of the harm reduction support needs of youth tended to be higher than training consultants' estimates. In particular, contractors noted significant need for such assistance as crisis support and help about attitudes to work.¹⁹ Consistent with this finding, training consultants also tended to estimate higher levels of youth need for employment supports than did contractors, although all identified high and extensive levels of needs among youth. Table Seven contrasts the different perceptions of Training Consultants, MSS staff and

¹⁹ Many contractors noted that youth's negative attitudes to work were often over-stated -- that youth have a strong desire to work. The help youth need concerning attitudes relates less to increasing their desire to work, but to addressing their lack of confidence and self-esteem (which affects their ability to market themselves or advocate on their own behalf), and doubts about the possibility of obtaining reasonable employment in the present job market.

contractors concerning the percentage of youth with a variety of employment-related needs (when asked the question, "Based on your client group, could you estimate the percent of youth needing each of the following types of support?" An average percent was then calculated for each survey group and each type of support).

Much of the discussion concerning harm reduction supports and the focus of YES projects was on the appropriate time period over which impacts could reasonably be achieved with this target group. Contractors, MSS staff (particularly Financial Assistance Workers), and Training Consultants clearly identified the YES client group as "a hard one to deal with effectively," comprised for the most part of youth who have experienced significant problems in their lives, ranging from histories of abuse, unsafe or unstable living situations, being on the street or one step away from it, and having a marginal attachment to society even in terms of obtaining or maintaining eligibility for income assistance. Many have experienced conflict with the legal system. Others have had less concrete problems to deal with, but have left school early, have been unable to make the transition to the work world, and have no other options to fall back on.

TABLE SEVEN: Perceptions of youth employment needs by Training Consultants, MSS Staff and Contractors

Type of support needed to improve employability	Training Consultants n=31		MSS Staff n=14		Contractors n=39	
	% with need	rank	% with need	rank	% with need	rank
Job search / resume writing	90.5%	1	91.6%	1	93.0%	1
Skill training	90.4%	2	89.1%	2	89.5%	2
Career decision making	88.7%	3	78.3%	4	80.4%	5
Work experience	88.5%	4	73.8%	7	77.1%	8
Job orientation / maintenance	85.3%	5	82.5%	3	80.2%	6
Interpersonal / communication skills	80.8%	6	77.1%	6	82.3%	3
Educational upgrading	78.4%	7	70.0%	8	82.2%	4
Problem solving / conflict resolution	77.5%	8	77.9%	5	79.7%	7
Attitudes to education or work	76.1%	9	68.8%	9	72.6%	9
Personal or family counselling	66.5%	10	50.8%	12	69.8%	10
Help dealing with living situations	63.8%	11	60.0%	10	66.8%	12
Help in dealing with authority	60.3%	12	53.2%	11	67.0%	11
Crisis support	56.8%	13	41.9%	13	65.8%	13
Substance abuse help	50.6%	14	40.8%	14	45.9%	14

Until very recently, YES projects addressed the needs of youth from the high end -- those youth who were almost job-ready, but needed some help making that final transition -- to the needs of those who were on the verge of stepping outside the system completely. In the past some projects even helped youth who did not meet the program requirement of being on assistance or being a "youth in care" by helping the youths get into the system and receiving Income Assistance (IA) as a first step on what was perceived as a long road to employment. This reflected the program's origin at MSS. Many of the more outreach-oriented projects still provide assistance on the basis of client need, even doing preliminary work to help people apply for IA and become program eligible. But the contractors that have been running this type of project have felt increasing pressure from the Ministry to shift programs and focus on the correct target group, with increasingly demanding success criteria for participants.

For some contractors this has meant focusing on results and creaming -- recruiting candidates into projects who are more likely to complete and make the next steps into employment. For these contractors, the focus of projects has changed to suit a shifting target group. Other contractors have faced shutting down their projects, because they are geared to a particular client group, and the activities would not be appropriate or necessary for more job-ready clients.

Definitions of participant success

An illuminating survey question for this issue was the one that asked for definitions of success for a YES participant. This question was addressed by Training Consultants, MSS staff and contractors, and in many ways indicates substantial support by Ministry staff for the concerns articulated by contractors. While "obtaining more education or training" was ranked highly as an indicator of success by all three survey groups, employment was mentioned by just under two-thirds of Training Consultants, just over half of MSS staff, but less than a third of contractors. The highest ranking item was some indication that the participant was "closer to obtaining employment," which encompassed a wide range of measures for respondents.

**TABLE EIGHT: Definitions of participant success
mentioned by Training Consultants, MSS Staff and Contractors**

Definition of Participant Success	Training Consultants n=31		MSS Staff n=14		Contractors n=39	
	%	rank	%	rank	%	rank
Closer to obtaining employment	74.2%	1	57.1%	1	46.2%	3

Obtaining more education/training	67.7%	2	50.0%	3	64.1%	2
Employment	64.5%	3	57.1%	1	30.8%	5
Active job search / doing something	54.8%	4	50.0%	3	33.3%	4
Personal development / self-esteem	48.4%	5	42.9%	5	66.7%	1
Getting work experience	45.2%	6	14.3%	7	15.4%	8
Completed project / stable attendance	32.3%	7	28.6%	6	30.8%	5
Getting off Income Assistance	22.6%	8	14.3%	7	5.1%	10
Acquiring stable housing	9.7%	9	--	--	25.6%	7
Defined as tailored to individual	--	--	--	--	15.4%	8

A softer measure of success, "personal development or increased self-esteem" was the most highly ranked success criterion by contractors (mentioned by two-thirds of respondents), and was also mentioned by almost half of the Training Consultants and over 40% of MSS staff surveyed. Over a quarter of contractors also mentioned acquiring stable housing as an indicator of success for a participant. In another question dealing with program success, 100% of Training Consultants and 93% of MSS staff agreed with the statement "Harm reduction activities are important for YES to be successful." Over half of Training Consultants and a third of MSS staff strongly agreed.

Surprisingly, completing the project was mentioned by less than a third of each group surveyed, and getting off assistance was mentioned by less than a quarter. The latter was the lowest ranked of the ten most frequently cited indicators of participant success by contractors.

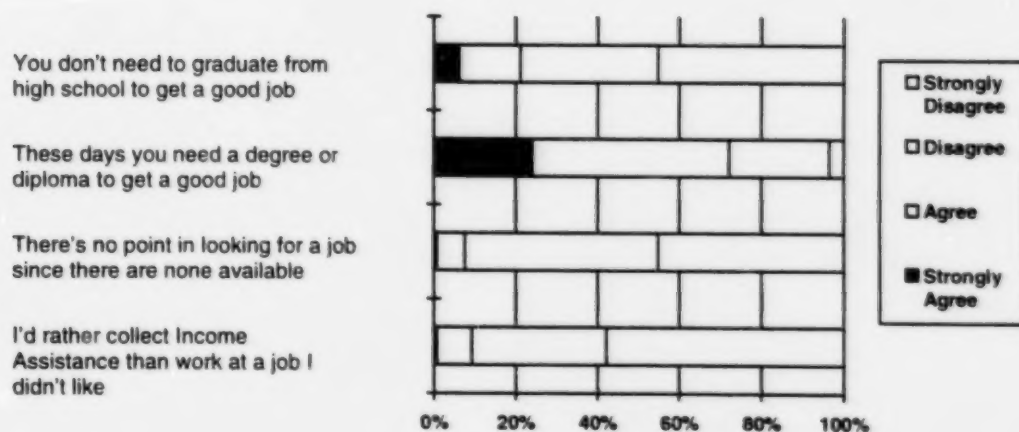
Participant self-esteem was an issue that was raised repeatedly by both contractors and staff. Most acknowledged that with this client group, a key difficulty with clients was ensuring that they were motivated to participate and move ahead. Some saw this lack of motivation as a negative attitude to work or to the education system, but most saw it more as a sense of defeat and cynicism about either the possibility of obtaining work (because of the perceived lack of jobs) or a lack of self-confidence in youth about their ability to obtain it. The participant surveys certainly showed strong interest and desire on the part of participants to obtain work or progress in moving towards employment.

An interesting facet of the issue of youth motivation and self-esteem is the way youth have heard the messages given to them about the need to stay in school and obtain education and skills. Almost 80% of participants surveyed disagreed with the statement "You don't need to graduate from high school to get a good job," and just under three-quarters of respondents agreed with the statement "These days you need a degree or diploma to get a good job." This message given to young people has a double edge to it. On the one hand, it promotes a positive attitude to

obtaining further education and training, and to staying in school. On the other, it can lead to a sense of futility for those who do not realistically have opportunities to obtain this education or training. However, over 92% of participants in the survey disagreed with the statement "There's no point in looking for a job since there are none available," and over 90% disagreed with the statement "I'd rather collect Income Assistance than do work I didn't like." Almost 60% of participants strongly disagreed with the last statement. Figure Two graphically portrays participants' agreement with these four statements.

While contractors and staff tended to agree about YES participants' need for self-esteem, there was disagreement about the role of the program in addressing this barrier, and it often came down to a chicken and egg dilemma. As one Ministry manager put it, contractors tend to think of youth as needing help to build self-esteem so that they can get a job. But he tended to think that having a job was the best way to build self-esteem. Contractors tend to want to provide the range of assistance and services that lead to employment in a supportive and staged manner that addresses the current (but always changing) needs of the client. From this perspective, the Ministry, through the changes to the contracting processes and introduced success criteria, has shifted from a client-centred perspective to one that is goal and outcome focused. For contractors (and many government staff in both ministries), this means that the long-term goal of the program is becoming more difficult to reach, because many of the necessary rungs of the ladder are being removed, and those with the highest level of need are not being served.

Figure Two: Agreement with statements about work and jobs by participant survey respondents (n=347)



The evaluators repeatedly heard from contractors, participants, Ministry staff and youth stakeholders that it is very important for youth to have real, meaningful and

realistic goals to work toward, and to take part in meaningful activities in order to progress. The individual who noted that the best way to promote self-esteem was by having a job had a very good point, but perhaps it was too limited. Rather than saying that self-esteem is the precursor to being employable, or that it comes from being employed, the general message seems to be that it is the process of striving for employment, of trying to obtain skills, and of taking steps toward upgrading education that provide the most benefit to the participants who are most in need and closest to the margins of our society. The benefits to them in terms of employment and attachment to the workforce are less obvious and possibly longer term in arriving, but the distance they must travel is either further or follows a different route.

A factor in making a project successful that was consistently highly rated by all survey groups was having the participation in a project or in specific activities take place at the right time for the participant. Many respondents mentioned how important it was to have a range of appropriate activities, and make sure they were available when they were needed. Some contractors pointed this out as a key to addressing the issue of motivation of clients -- if youth know what they're coming to participate in, and are ready for the experience, then there will be little likelihood of failure. On the other hand, flexibility in being able to allow participants to drop out if they find that it isn't what they need or can handle right then, and return at some future point when they can demonstrate that they are ready, was seen as important by several contractors.

Employability

One goal of the Training and Employability Division is to enhance people's employability as defined by the Conference Board of Canada. The survey of participants asked respondents to describe the amount that their participation in the YES project had contributed to their development in several areas. Several of these items were developed to try and measure participants' progress in terms of defined employability factors. The three most highly ranked items were all key employability skills as described in the Conference Board of Canada publication.²⁰ Employability skills have been summarized in three categories, 1) *Academic skills* -- communication skills, critical thinking, and preparedness for lifelong learning; 2) *Personal Management skills* -- positive attitudes and behaviors, responsibility, and adaptability; and 3) *Teamwork skills* -- working with others. It is interesting that most of these skills are "soft skills" compared to the specific employment preparation activities noted as important by TCs or other staff. In particular, the employability skills encompass such soft skill areas as attitudes to work and learning and self-esteem -- which contractors would describe as closer to harm reduction program elements.

²⁰ Conference Board of Canada. "Employability Skills Profile," Ottawa: Conference Board of Canada, 1993.

Participants' ranking of how YES contributed to their abilities and development:

<i>Ranked program impact</i>	<i>% saying program contributed "lots"</i>
1. Ability to work with others	62.0%
2. Positive attitude to working	57.6%
3. Ability to communicate	53.5%
4. Ability to find work	52.3%
5. Personal well-being	51.8%
6. Personal development	50.9%
7. Sense of being in control of things	45.7%
8. Ability to think critically	46.5%
9. Ability to upgrade education	37.4%
10. Accessing further training	31.7%

Barriers to employment faced by youth

The youth surveyed described a wide range of barriers to employment that they faced, ranging from factors relatively within their control such as their personal appearance (body piercings and hair colour / style, etc.) to external factors such as the labour market and the weather.

A barrier to employment and to participation in YES projects that was mentioned by both staff (TCs and Skills BC Coordinators) and contractors was recent changes to the program that removed some of the financial supports for such things as bus passes and some basic employment expenses. As several individuals put it, working -- or doing work experience -- costs money, and young people often find the small added expenses to be prohibitive.

The top eight barriers mentioned by respondents who were not employed when surveyed were:

<i>Ranked barriers to employment</i>	<i>% of respondents mentioning barrier</i>
1. Lack of education or training	21.1%
2. Lack of experience	16.1%
3. Lack of jobs / the labour market	13.9%
4. Child care responsibilities	8.0%
5. Discouraged / lack motivation / low self-esteem	7.1%
6. Lack concrete job skills	6.6%
7. Discrimination (youth, gender, racial)	6.3%
8. Lack of transportation	3.7%

3.4.1 Contrast of the needs of youth participants age 15-18 and 19-24

Contractors, Training Consultants and MSS staff painted a picture of the typical client between the ages of 15 and 18 as less mature, less capable of or ready to make decisions about work and their lives, with less education, work experience and life skills, less stability, and less commitment to programs than those between 19 and 24. The younger group was described as having more obvious issues to deal with, and more in need of harm reduction supports and basic life skills programming. On the other hand, some respondents pointed out the younger participants often have less hardened employment barriers, and are more open to receiving input than older ones.

While most respondents had little difficulty in developing a characterization of younger participants and what their needs and differences were, many were quick to point out that all of these distinctions were ones of degree and not of kind, and

that there are very mature 15 and 16 year olds who are ready for programs and in need of work experience and training, while some 23 or 24 year olds are in need of basic life skills and intensive supports. The consensus was that as program facilitators and administrators, respondents tried to address each client on the basis of individual needs, rather than making broad generalizations based on age.

The participant surveys showed younger aged clients to be marginally less likely to complete projects, be employed after the program, or take skill training after the program than those age 19 and over. Those 15-18 were more likely to enroll in educational upgrading or school completion programs, and were more often participants in shorter or variable duration, outreach oriented and lower cost projects.

As might be expected based on the perceptions of contractors, MSS staff and TCs, younger participants were more likely to have received harm reduction types of support, such as personal counselling, support during a crisis, and help with living situations. Younger participants also were more likely to receive help from a mentor and help with accessing further education. Participants aged 19 and over were more likely to have received help writing a resume, pay while training or learning, job search assistance, work experience, training in communication skills or problem solving, and help developing a training plan.

Contrary to what might be expected, YES participants aged 15-18 were more likely than those 19 or older to identify either getting a job or getting work experience as their most hoped for benefit from participation in the program. Site visits to projects confirmed that younger participants were keenly interested in employment.

A further point of interest is that a higher proportion of participants aged 15-18 were female. This finding might be an artifact of the greater transience of younger males (perhaps resulting in their under-representation in the survey), however, it could also be a finding of potential concern to the Ministry, if changes to youth programming differentially impact on females than males.

4. YES MANAGEMENT AND DELIVERY

In part because of the rapid series of changes that have been introduced to the Ministry over the past two years, and in part because of different regional contexts and contracting possibilities, there has been a high degree of inconsistency in activities, procedures and timing of change across the five Ministry regions, and often within regions as well. Adjustments to the contracting process have been a major source of change (other than the introduction of Youth Works / BC Benefits, which will not be discussed here) within local and regional offices. This section will describe changes and impacts on referral practices, roles, responsibilities and community linkages.

4.1 Contracting and project selection

An important consideration when examining the impacts of the new project selection environment is that the RFP and contracting processes have changed significantly over the course of this study. The ministry has been responding to many contractor concerns about the new contracting process. RFPs are now usually more specific and targeted, and projects are planned and developed based on regional offices' understanding of community and client needs. In some areas, particularly more urban ones in which there are more contractors and there is a capability and need for more diverse programming, a newer approach has been developed, using first Requests for Information (RFI -- who's interested in running projects or providing services), then Requests for Qualifications (RFQ -- how are the interested parties qualified for the services and projects), and finally the Request for Proposals (RFP), which is sent to a selected bidder's list developed based on the RFQ.

The recent introduction of the three part RFI / RFQ / RFP process seems to have clarified and improved relationships with many contractors across the province, although there are still issues around contracting *per se* that continue to cause tension. A continuing issue for regional offices is the appropriateness of some of the "one size fits all" administrative and process practices that headquarters has been providing to and in the view of many regional staff, imposing on regional offices. The contracting boiler plate is a good example, as it has been a source of concern within the Ministry and among contractors as it has contributed to projects becoming increasingly similar, and decreasing contract diversity and innovation. Ministry staff were interested in having such a boiler plate as an example on which to build contracts, but were concerned with what they perceived as too little flexibility to adapt and change the basic contract and (at least initially) the RFP format to meet local community needs. This was most strongly felt in regional offices at the extremes -- large urban centres such as Vancouver that had a unique contracting environment, and smaller communities such as in the north where the whole processes appeared to be inappropriate given the limited number and

capabilities of contractors with whom staff could develop projects. Despite these challenges, Training Consultants overwhelmingly welcomed the "professionalization" of the contracting process, as 96% expressed agreement that the new RFP processes had the potential to improve the YES program. On the other hand, 62% of contractors disagreed with that statement. Two thirds of contractors also disagreed with the statement "the RFP process allows us to plan and describe our project realistically."

Vancouver's contracting situation has been impacted by shifts in the relationship with Human Resources Development Canada, particularly as contractors who have been supplying services and programs to the federal government have begun to compete for provincial projects, and have brought with them contracting and professional relationship expectations that reflect a different funding base, procedures, and skill base on the part of contracting staff. The changes to Ministry staff roles and responsibilities have been extensive through this period, and based on the survey information, there is a perception that more support is needed for staff to be able to do their work effectively. Only 28% of Training Consultants agreed that they have had adequate training for their responsibilities.

A complicating factor in many offices has been the role of YES as part of a range of programs that included Community Employment and Training (CET) and Bridging. In some cases, broad RFPs were let out that tried to situate YES within a strategic vision of community need that placed youth programming within the context of all training contracts in the community. However, YES represents a smaller budget and proportion of office activities and priorities. For some contractors, this meant that youth issues were treated as less important by the Ministry, and that it was less possible for the contracting process to address the complete range of program and service needs of this target group. In effect, trying to situate YES and YES clients strategically meant that there was less effort to target and differentiate within the youth target group. Staff and management of the Ministry expressed concern that it would be difficult to do more than they had been with the limited staff resources available. One manager noted that while at MSS, the program and youth had the resources of a large ministry with many staff to deal with their needs. At MSTL / MoEST, 130 Training Consultants could not possibly maintain the same level of community contact and direct client interaction. Resourcing appeared to be a serious concern for many staff, particularly with new (and as yet unclear) responsibilities concerning BC Benefits.

The new RFP process in part grew out of the broader demand to reform contracting procedures generally across government. However, it also reflected the Ministry's desire to redefine the program's mandate to better suit the employment and training focus of the Ministry, and improve program and project accountability.

Several senior field staff in the Ministry stated that they were interested in finding ways to promote or establish better relationships among contractors, and more

creativity and innovation in project and program design. But the initial efforts to introduce a new contracting process actually worked to make it more difficult to achieve these goals. The competitive RFP process as first implemented in many regions of the province introduced a form of competition among agencies that seriously undermined their ability and willingness to work together. This was exacerbated by the way the initial RFPs were holistic in their requests for services and projects rather than targeted to specific community or client needs. The RFPs called for each project to provide a similar wide range of activities, not only more employment-focused than previous contracts, but also more similar and with less specialization of activities. To avoid being shut out of the contracting process, contractors competed for projects or to provide activities or services that they would not normally have undertaken, or they submitted proposals relevant to what they had been delivering successfully for several years, only to be told that this activity no longer fit within the framework of the projects that were going to be funded. Either way, some contractors began delivering programs that they did not have the staff or experience to deliver as well as other agencies. Others lost their contracts and in some cases had to shut down their organizations. In both situations, the relationships among the contractors that had been built up over several years were in many cases changed or ended. This contributed to the development of the gap in services to clients.

Good inter-agency relationships are important to a program such as YES because they allow contractors to effectively refer clients, coordinate services and programs, and generally develop a network of projects that could benefit clients and strengthen each agency's abilities to be effective and efficient. Anecdotal information from the surveys of contractors as well as discussions with some managers and administrators in the ministry indicates that in some communities the relationships among contractors was a significant factor in how contractors developed their projects and adapted them to meet the needs of their clients. It is important for Ministry staff to be aware of the significant impact that program changes and reforms they introduce can have on inter-agency and local community relationships and effectiveness.

4.2 Referrals

Fifty-six percent of respondents to the participant survey said that they first heard about the project from their Social Worker (26%) or Financial Assistance Worker (20%) at MSS. Less than 3% indicated hearing about the project from a Training Consultant. Twenty percent heard about the project from a friend, another 5% from a family member, and about 13% said they heard about it directly from a contractor or by responding to an ad in the media placed by a contractor.

Contractors noted that the referral process has changed over time, and that the proportion of referrals coming from Training Consultants has declined, and the

proportion coming from self-referral or active recruitment by the contractor has increased. Contractors identified MSS staff, Training Consultants and self-referral to be the three most common referral routes.

Contractors made little distinction in effectiveness or appropriateness of the referral based on the source of that referral, with the exception that self-referred individuals tended to be more highly motivated and were more likely to complete projects. Ministry staff and contractors both agreed that a good indication of the success of a contract is the level of referral to a project by past participants and youth who are familiar with what the project does. In the same sense, Training Consultants noted that attrition from a project was another indication of problems -- that while youth tend not to be strong self advocates, they do have the ability to "vote with their feet," and give a message that a project is not responsive or has problems.

Training Consultants were more concerned with program attrition than were either MSS staff or Contractors. On the other hand, even TCs expressed the view that dropping out or not completing a project was not necessarily a bad outcome, as quitting to take advantage of a job opportunity was considered quite appropriate. Indeed, over a third of participants surveyed who said they did not complete their projects indicated that they quit because they found employment. Further, an analysis of the participants who were employed for the longest duration in the year after the project (the top 50% in terms of the number of weeks employed) showed them to have a lower project completion rate -- 67% -- than did those who were unemployed and looking for work for the longest duration (the 50% with the highest number of weeks unemployed in the year after the project), of whom 73% completed the project.

There is a high level of diversity in Training Consultants' roles in dealing with youth directly, both across regions and within them (particularly for the larger regions such as the lower mainland and the Fraser Valley). In many cases, TCs continue to deal directly with clients and refer to projects. In others, they have taken on the role of a "coach" and provide limited direct assistance but refer to appropriate programs and services. In many offices TCs wait and do an Individual Opportunity Plan (IOP) with a client after they have been referred and have started the project. Often they do this by dropping by the project at an early stage, and meeting participants in a group to discuss their responsibilities and the nature of the Ministry's involvement. Increasingly, TCs are taking on project management responsibilities, including monitoring and providing support to projects. In a few areas, TCs specialize with respect to youth clients. Strong support was expressed by Ministry staff for the introduction of Assessment, Counselling and Referral (ACR) centres and options for local communities.

4.3 Roles and responsibilities

The rapid change in programming, introduction of BC Benefits, shift of the program to MSTL from MSS and then the shift of MSTL to MoEST have created an atmosphere of constant change, insecurity and concern within the Ministry and without. Staff and contractors expressed concern about the consistency of messages received in regional offices and local communities from head office, and the ability of staff to accurately and effectively explain Ministry policies and guidelines to contractors and the community at large. Sixty percent of Training Consultants disagreed, and 27% strongly disagreed with the statement "the Ministry has clearly explained role expectations to TCs." This concern was seconded by contractors, 58% of whom disagreed with the statement "the Ministry's policies have been made clear to me," and two-thirds of whom disagreed with the statement "the Ministry communicates its goals and objectives clearly to project contractors."

Contractors expressed the view that Training Consultants were "victims" in this situation in the same sense that they were, dealing with a situation of rapid change without adequate supports. While contractors expressed some ambivalence concerning the flexibility of the Ministry to be able to meet the needs of specific projects (58% disagreed with the statement), a common response was that the Ministry was previously more flexible, but was increasingly becoming rigid and bureaucratic in how it dealt with contracts and contractors. This was considered to be particularly problematic for youth programming, which demands a great deal of flexibility and an ability to adjust quickly in order to meet the changing needs of youth.

In many parts of the province, contracts are being managed less often now by individual Training Consultants in local offices, and more often by a smaller group of staff, Skills BC Coordinators or Area Managers who specialize in these activities. Because of the large number of contracts in the lower mainland region, a system of contract management teams has been introduced, and staff and managers appear to be quite pleased with their ability to more effectively and efficiently coordinate on contracting issues and deal with contractors in a consistent and professional manner. The process was introduced too late in the course of the evaluation to be able to discover contractor satisfaction or concerns with the new processes. However, based on other comments by contractors, the evaluators anticipate that this will be seen as an improvement within the contracting community. Contractors expressed serious concerns about the inconsistencies in the current contracting practices, preferring to have fewer and well-identified staff contacts for their project. They also were concerned about the availability of staff who had other responsibilities, and who often took a great deal of time to respond to requests for information or support. Further, contractors were concerned about the speed and efficiency of the contract management practices, citing delays in receiving cheques, and in some cases the need to temporarily shut down projects on occasion when funding did not come through in time.

The survey of contractors indicated a wide diversity of views regarding the Ministry / contractor relationship. Perhaps the most significant factor affecting the contractors' view of the ministry was the level of contact between the contractor and the Ministry contact person, whether they were a TC, Skills BC Coordinator or Area Manager. Where the Ministry representative was in regular contact with the contractor, views of the Ministry tended to be positive. However, in situations where several months passed between liaison with the Ministry, MSTL was assessed as being overly bureaucratic, unorganized, unclear in goals and objectives, and inflexible. Rapid changes to policies and procedures over the past three years have contributed to this perspective among some contractors.

In general, although contracting and contract management procedures are being refined and improved, staff expressed an interest in having opportunities to interact with others to compare notes, administrative practices and contracting concerns with their counterparts in other provincial regions. It was noted that while opportunities to get together to discuss some issues do exist, particularly for Area Managers, often the agendas for these meetings are filled, and there is little flexibility to introduce new or topical concerns, or to discuss activities in a way that can allow regions to benefit from other staff activities, best practices and innovations.

An important activity requested of all contractors was that they conduct follow-up of participants to determine outcomes and to inform planning and refinement of projects. Eighty-five percent of contractors said that they do follow-up, and another eight percent said they tried but that it was very difficult to do. Anecdotal information about follow-up indicated that it is being done in a fairly haphazard manner. Typical among responses by contractors were comments such as, "The best way we've found for doing follow-up is encouraging participants to drop back in to visit us. We give them as many reasons to do so as possible -- resume updating, free coffee, getting them involved as mentors or helpers with new groups of participants . . ." Contractors often found this to be more successful because the youth tended to be quite transient (particularly for some outreach oriented projects) and often did not have telephones.

One atypical but disquieting comment was, "Yes we do follow-up. We send out questionnaires to participants, but we're thinking we might change to a phone follow-up because we've never received any replies." Contractors expressed the view that they do not have many resources to put towards doing follow-up, and that it is extremely difficult with this target population. Indeed, TCs expressed more optimism about their future potential for doing some sort of follow-up using the GAIN information system, and some sort of centralized client tracking system might be worth investigating, particularly in medium-sized to larger communities.

4.4 Linkages

As can be seen from the discussion in the previous sections on the concerns about the RFP process and impacts of changes to the YES program expressed by staff and project contractors, there has been a substantial tension between contractors and the Ministry since the program was transferred from MSS. This tension was expressed more clearly and strongly by contractors than by Ministry staff. Another facet of this tension that was mentioned by several contractors was the ongoing relationship between contractors and Ministry contacts.

A concern expressed by contractors was that the efforts to professionalize the relationship between staff and contractors have been interpreted as meaning that interaction is more hands-off and distant. Contractors are concerned that activities such as project monitoring should not be one-directional. They feel that the relationship should be reciprocal, and that staff have responsibilities to contractors to keep them informed of developments, invite their participation in planning and strategic activities, and provide active supports in setting up projects and providing information and other support materials that could enhance projects' effectiveness. This is particularly an issue for smaller contractors and non-profit agencies, which have less resources and usually have less diversity in staff skills and expertise.

In response to the statement "I communicate often enough with my MSS/MSTL counterparts," 71% of Training Consultants and 85% of MSS staff expressed agreement. On the other hand, almost 30% of MSS staff interviewed disagreed with the statement "I feel well-informed about the range of YES projects available." This is a concern because of the extensive role of MSS staff in referral to projects, and the way the sample was developed -- the MSS staff interviewed were identified through Training Consultant contacts as those most familiar with YES and YES projects. In several field offices, Ministry staff have developed regularly-updated manuals and program and service guides that describe the range of projects funded, how to access them, intake dates and referral information, and contact numbers. These are then distributed to all possible referral venues in the area, including MSS staff and offices, contractors, and other organizations that do referral to programs, such as high schools and Human Resources Development Canada offices. The approach seems to have been well-received by contractors and referral agents.

With some notable exceptions, links to high schools have been problematic in many areas, as schools have tended to be focused on the needs of youth who are still in school, and not inclined to provide much assistance to those who have left the public school system. Obtaining senior level support within the Ministry for schools and guidance offices to pro-actively provide links to field offices and YES projects has been suggested as a way of improving the likelihood that community links will be made between schools and youth programming in general.

In most offices, the primary links to local employers involved with the YES program appear to be through contractors. Yet contractors, and particularly smaller organizations, have expressed difficulty in reaching out to employers directly, as they often respond better to government employees. Further, the market for work experience placements is getting increasingly crowded as it is introduced as an option in numerous federal and provincial programs, and as high schools and colleges expand their efforts to find suitable placements and cooperative work experience opportunities for students. Several contractors expressed interest in having centralized directories of employers who have in the past or could in the future provide work placements. Employers interviewed also expressed some interest in such a process, as they find it difficult to be approached on numerous occasions and by different organizations (or even individuals within an organization) to provide a placement. Another potential benefit of such a process is that the potential range of work experience, placement, mentoring, and job shadowing options is extremely diverse. Many organizations use only one or two methods. Employers who have only been involved with one format -- especially if they had some problem with how it worked for them -- may end their involvement with providing work experience opportunities when they could potentially and more profitably be involved in other kinds of experience with a different client group or a different style of placement. A centralized approach to work placement could be of significant benefit to the YES program in accessing the untapped potential in the community of employers. Examples of successful centralized work experience and placement processes do exist in some communities, sometimes developed and maintained by school boards.

The issue of timing projects and activities to meet the needs of clients appears to involve several program attributes; 1) having a range of appropriate projects that meet different client needs, 2) ensuring that there are appropriate referral avenues among options, and 3) ensuring that projects articulate well and are coordinated in terms of the activities and methods used with participants. This can require significant cooperation and communication among contractors, and is difficult to do in a constantly shifting contract environment. Establishing links and laddering among projects takes time, effort, and often substantial resources and assistance to facilitate long-term coordination. As noted above, an unintended impact of the new contracting processes has been to undermine the development of effective relationships among contractors. Further, funding uncertainty within the entire contracting environment affects long-term contractor and program stability, and makes the development and achievement of local community strategic planning more difficult.

4.5 Summary: Best administrative practices

Based on discussions with TCs and other Ministry staff, and to a lesser extent, MSS staff and contractors, a list of suggestions for administrative best practices was

developed. Some were suggested because they are already in practice in one or more locations. Others were suggested as "it would be nice if we could do this." For convenience the best practices have been presented in two categories -- those for which precedents exist, and those that have not yet been implemented, or may have been tried, but have not yet been widely publicized. Some have been mentioned in the text of the report. Some may also contradict other best practices. What works in one region or community may not work in all.

Best Practices -- currently done by some but not all . . .

- Develop mutual and reciprocal relationships with contractors. Monitoring contracts is not a one way activity. Contractors need support in setting up and running contracts. Professional relationships need not be distant or hands-off.
- Ensure that all contractors have access to internet e-mail.
- Develop and maintain project manuals that provide listings of local projects, contact names and numbers, referral links and support programs and services, and make this available broadly -- to contractors, MSS Social Workers and FAWs, Training Consultants, HRDC project officers or other interested community parties.
- Promote and develop Assessment, Counselling and Referral centres.
- Promote skill acquisition and professional development among contractors. For example, develop and maintain brown bag sessions on topical issues as informal ways of promoting interaction among staff of MSS and MoEST, contractors, and other agencies.
- Improve communication of expectations to staff, and conduct consultations with staff prior to implementing major program changes.
- Improve the Ministry's internal computer client tracking system.
- Provide more and better training for staff with respect to their roles as contract administrators.
- Provide opportunities for staff (Training Consultants, Area Managers and Skills BC Coordinators) to interact and share information and best practices related to administration and innovative project activities.
- Maintain better interministerial coordination on youth issues at senior levels.
- Provide timely response on contractor invoicing and inquiries.

Best Practices -- it would be nice if we could . . .

- Develop centralized or coordinated work experience and placement options. Develop databases of employers and help address contractors' need to find placements. Improve efficiency so that employers are not being called several times by different contractors. Coordinate with HRDC and other stakeholders.

- Develop centralized follow-up processes where appropriate. Use a separate contract to have one organization maintain client tracking and follow up, or improve client tracking capabilities so that it could be done internally.
- Address unnecessary competition among funders through the RFP process, or through alternatives to the RFP process.
- Develop a catalogue of relevant training materials and curricula that contractors could share / sell / purchase / adapt to meet their clients' needs. If necessary or possible, purchase this material and / or modularize it so that it could be shared with other contractors to reduce the inefficiency of each contractor independently developing similar curricula and programs. This would also allow the Ministry to make sure important content is included and available, although it would be important to ensure that contractors could flexibly adapt materials to their own client group, project and community setting.

5. YOUTH INVOLVEMENT IN PLANNING AND OVERSEEING YES

One of the initial findings about the YES program was that the program's goal of involving youth and the BC Youth in Care Network in program decisions and project approvals was not happening. In part, this appears to be related to the transfer of the program from MSS to MSTL. The Ministry staff did not have the same range of contacts as those in MSS, but more importantly, since projects were simply being rolled over, there were in effect few decisions on which to try to include interest groups. Only a third of TCs agreed with the statement "Youth are involved in planning and designing YES projects."

Contractors were also expected to involve youth in decision-making and development of their projects. Many contractors stated that they have invited youth input, but the different methods described and inconsistent success achieved has reflected a fairly haphazard approach to involving youth. Most contractors supported the idea of youth involvement in developing and planning projects. Over 95% of contractors agreed and almost two-thirds strongly agreed with the statement "Involving youth in planning increases the success of a project." Over 85% of contractors agreed with the statements "We actively encourage youth to be involved in designing and developing our YES project," and "Our YES project has high enough levels of youth participation and influence in its design and operation."

Participants were asked about the level of their participation in various project activities, and the majority said that they did not have lots of opportunities to make contributions to planning, managing or designing projects. Over 60% of respondents to the participant surveys said they did participate in carrying out project activities.

Discussions with community stakeholders, contractors and Ministry staff did produce some recommended best practices on how to invite and realistically accommodate youth participation in program design and delivery.

5.1 Best practices for youth involvement

- Contact young people when an issue arises, vs. having them participate in existing bureaucratic structures. Child and Youth Committees have had very limited success in inviting youth membership and participation. Other groups tend to take advantage of "star" performing youth, and demand too much of them without giving enough supports, and then the youth burn out.
- Provide real and adequate resources for consumer involvement and consultation.

- Use existing youth groups and coalitions to access and consult on important issues. Most groups end up being multi-issue, and can give links to other groups.
- Develop a youth advisory committee for the program composed of former participants. Provide them with training and resources so that they can assist with project selection, contract monitoring, and community liaison. Have overlapping participation to promote peer training and accrual of knowledge and skills.
- Provide opportunities for and invite youth to be involved with former projects as advisors, members of advisory or steering committees, peer counsellors, workshop facilitators, and mentors.

6. THE ELEMENTS OF SUCCESS FOR YES PROJECTS

One of the goals of this evaluation was to identify the characteristics of "successful" projects in order to facilitate project selection and development by the Ministry. However, the study design focused on identifying project elements associated with participant success, rather than identifying successful projects that could be copied. While there would likely be some merit to the latter, rating projects is something done more successfully and meaningfully as part of monitoring and reporting.

Another measure of project success used in this study was asking Training Consultants and MSS staff for their definitions of a successful project. Both groups were primarily focused on participant outcomes in terms of employment, education, training, employability and self-esteem, as described in section 3.4 above. Other significant factors mentioned included having projects meet their stated objectives, the completion rate for the project, having a good relationship between the contractor and the participants (including good follow-up efforts), and having good project staff, management and accountability. Table Nine lists the main definitions of project success described by TCs and MSS staff.

TABLE NINE: Definitions of project success mentioned by Training Consultants and MSS Staff				
Definition of Project Success	Training Consultants n=31		MSS Staff n=14	
	%	rank	%	rank
Participant outcomes	74.2%	1	78.6%	1
Meeting stated project objectives	41.9%	2	14.3%	5
Completion rate	29.0%	3	7.1%	6
Good project management / staff	25.8%	4	28.6%	3
Flexibility and variety of project	19.4%	5	7.1%	6
Good relationship between the participant and contractor	19.4%	5	35.7%	2
Demanding but achievable / realistic	16.1%	7	7.1%	6
Good linkages with gov't / agencies	12.9%	8	--	--
Participant satisfaction	6.5%	9	28.6%	3

Training Consultants, MSS staff and contractors were also asked what factors affected project effectiveness. Contractors were asked to deal with a slightly different list of factors, reflecting their role in developing and selecting projects and project activities. For this reason, comparisons between contractors and staff must

be made with caution, as some items were not common to both sets of interview questions. Yet it is interesting that some of the factors listed as most important (on a scale of very important, fairly important, of little importance, and not at all important) to Ministry employees were ranked lower by contractors, and *vice versa*. For example, both TCs and MSS staff ranked "follow-up" as quite important, but contractors felt it was less important than other factors. Similarly, "location of the project" was important to contractors, but considered less important than most other factors by staff. In part, contractors' higher ranking for the factor of "location" may reflect concerns about the appropriateness of classroom settings for the youth they deal with in their projects.

Top five ranked factors affecting project effectiveness (rank)

<i>Training Consultants</i>	<i>MSS staff</i>	<i>Contractors</i>
Good referrals to the right projects (1)	Follow-up (1)	Flexibility in dealing with diverse youth needs (1)
Skills & qualifications of the contractor (2)	Knowledge of local community needs (2)	Monitoring participants in work experience (2)
Follow-up (3)	Community linkages (3)	Involving youth in planning activities (3)
Community linkages (4)	Training Allowance (4)	Location of the project (4)
Contractor's experience with the target group (5)	Good referrals to the right projects (5)	Variety of project activities (5)

Bottom five ranked factors affecting project effectiveness (rank)

<i>Training Consultants</i>	<i>MSS staff</i>	<i>Contractors</i>
Type of contractor: (18) private sector/non-profit	Type of contractor: (18) private sector/non-profit	Training Allowance (12)
Size or scope of the project (17)	Location of the project (17)	Making sure participants are right for project (11)
Time contractor has been operating (16)	Time contractor has been operating (16)	Number of participants in a project (10)
Number of projects contractor has run (15)	Number of projects contractor has run (15)	Follow-up (9)
Location of the project	Variety of project	Duration of the

Analysis of participant outcomes after the project was completed using the participant surveys identified differences in impacts of the various types of project activity. Factors associated with post-program paid employment include:

- job search assistance
- training for specific skills
- work experience component
- longer duration work experience
- higher average cost per participant
- smaller number of participants per project
- higher educational attainment prior to YES

Project activities associated with post-program educational upgrading include:

- help finding a place to live
- help accessing educational upgrading
- completing the project
- lower educational attainment prior to YES
- younger in age -- 15-18 years

Project activities associated with having skill training since the program include:

- help knowing how to keep a job
- training for a specific job
- skill training through the project
- training in how to solve problems
- training in communication skills
- help in developing a training plan
- support during a crisis

Project activities associated with doing volunteer work since the program include:

- help in writing a resume
- training in communication skills

An interesting observation is that those having work experience during a project are less likely to participate in other job preparation training projects afterwards. This is significant because one of the common concerns of Training Consultants and Managers within the Ministry was that some clients tend to circulate and repeat projects, or different projects several times. Contractors and Training Consultants suggested that this might be remedied by having a better articulated and ladder network of projects for clients within a community. This way, youth could participate

in different projects as they were needed, and if there was less overlap in content between projects, then they would not be repeating content.

Because of the emphasis on self-esteem in the discussions with TCs and contractors, a separate analysis was conducted that examined self-esteem from the perspective of the participants. In a question asking about the main benefits received from participation in YES, approximately a dozen participants indicated that the main thing they got from the program was self-esteem. While the number of participants in this sub-group was small, and thus our ability to extrapolate the findings is limited, it is interesting to note that 92% of this group have had paid employment since the program, and 85% full-time employment, for an average of 37 weeks. Half were employed for the full year after the program ended. Thirty percent of this group had been unemployed and looking for work in the year after the program, with an average duration of unemployment of 17 weeks -- significantly lower than the average YES participant.

6.1 Best practices: Activities and project elements

Ministry and contractor activities:

- Develop two to four page project summaries that could be shared with other regions and offices across the province. Include enough detail on the type of activities, project organization and staffing, duration, cost and cost per participant, community linkages, and participant outcome levels so that staff could make informed choices in requesting more detailed information about the project.
- Try to develop a diverse range of projects that can ladder together with other programs and services, and build on links among agencies. This includes diversity in content (work experience, skill training, employment preparation, harm reduction), target group, duration, and format (full and part-time, continuous intake and fixed sessions, classroom and informal).
- Clarify referral processes with local stakeholders, and facilitate communication among those dealing directly with clients.
- Promote and facilitate community linkages among contractors, referral agencies, school boards, and other stakeholder groups such as Child and Youth Committees and the BC Youth in Care Network. Invite participation in planning activities, and pro-actively support existing linkages by offering recognition for outreach activities by staff and contractors.

- Promote participant-initiated follow-up by offering tangible benefits to participants for keeping in touch -- free resume printing / copying, opportunities to be involved with later groups as peer counsellors, opportunities to socialize, etc.
- Provide learning opportunities suitable to a client group that does not fare well in traditional classroom settings. Provide experiential learning opportunities, with direct hands-on experience, and when possible, non-classroom settings.
- Broaden projects so that participants gain exposure to others outside their usual peer group -- don't ghettoize them.
- Give participants opportunities to learn in a comfortable and non-threatening setting, among peers and at a pace that is flexible to meet their personal situations.
- Balance participants' experience with necessary support, but provide enough challenge to keep them active and progressing.
- Try to provide quick placement for clients who are ready for the experience -- delays and waiting lists impact on participant motivation and success.

Important project elements:

- Work experience, particularly full-time, of longer duration (8+ weeks), in meaningful settings, and with opportunities to review and discuss the experience.
- Skill training, in areas of likely possible local employment, and linked to work placement opportunities.
- Good harm reduction supports that can be accessed through other programs and services. Ensure all contractors have copies of program and service guides.
- Appropriate supports to address client employment barriers: bus passes, childcare, employment expenses.

7. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This report has documented findings from an evaluation study of the Youth Employment Skills program. The research involved conducting just under 500 interviews with past and current participants, Training Consultants, contractors, employers, community stakeholders and government managers and administrators.

Summary

The general consensus on the YES program is that the program is both worthwhile in what it offers to young people, and in the effects that it has had in helping them move towards employment. But most groups interviewed expressed concerns about the development of a significant gap in service to those most in need of harm reduction support. The gap in service reflects a decrease in program opportunities to those between 15 and 18 years of age, and for those youth who face more significant or multiple barriers to employment. The projects funded through YES appear to be increasingly homogeneous and similar. This reduction in the diversity of YES projects is directly contrary to the program's strengths as perceived by contractors, youth advocates, and youth interviewed through site visits. There is serious concern among these stakeholders that refocussing the program through less project diversity, changed success criteria, and more explicit employment emphasis has resulted in "creaming" -- that increasingly the young people accessing YES projects are those most job-ready and least in need of the program. This issue warrants further examination by the Ministry and clarification of the program's goals and intended target group.²¹

This concern also relates to the definition of what are appropriate activities for YES projects to provide. The surveys of participants and site visits confirmed that YES participants generally have a very strong interest in obtaining employment and achieving economic independence. This is particularly true for those participants who would be considered by program staff to be least job-ready and most in need of substantial harm reduction supports, and what would be termed softer types of employment support -- help in "getting their life in order" (stable housing, life skills), and improved self-esteem and work and life habits. While there is some indication that both staff and contractors view skill training, job search preparation and work experience to be the most critical factors in helping young people to obtain employment, other research suggests that when hiring young people for entry level positions, employers tend to focus on motivation, perceived work ethic, and the

²¹ The research design employed for this study did not allow for a detailed examination of access to the program for unsuccessful applicants, and this was identified as an issue by youth advocates, contractors, and members of the project steering committee.

personality of the applicant -- soft skills and work attitudes rather than hard skills that they feel can be gained through experience on the job.²²

The implications for YES relate to the availability of projects that offer a diverse range of activities, or can link or ladder with other programs and services, including other YES projects that have a different focus or meet different needs of clients. External and some internal stakeholders view the changes to the contracting environment as meaning that some of the rungs in the ladder to employment (particularly lower level rungs) have been removed, and young people facing multiple barriers to employment are finding it increasingly difficult to get onto the ladder.

The participant surveys examined projects at a point in time in which they were not yet subject to the changes in the range, distribution and activities of projects noted above. The surveys indicated a program that had a significant proportion of participants meeting target success criteria, although the biases in survey response rates may have led to an overstatement of positive program effects. Still, most TCs, MSS staff and contractors believe that YES has been effective in increasing youth's employability, and helping youth to gain independence and attachment to the workforce. The majority of respondents to the survey of past participants (89%) were involved in either paid employment, educational pursuits, or skill training since they left their YES project. Almost 83% were involved in one or more of the three types of activity in the first year after the project.

The most commonly undertaken activities by participants were help in writing a resume, obtaining information about jobs, and help in their job search, all of which were obtained by over 80% of participants. Among the most frequently hoped for activities by participants were work experience and training, which were actually undertaken by less than half of respondents to the surveys. The activities ranked most useful by participants tended to be those obtained by less participants: help finding a place to live, work experience opportunities, and support during a crisis. Harm reduction activities appear to have had a strong and useful role in YES projects, and while they were not the most hoped for or expected activity -- even by those who received them -- they were highly valued when provided. Some of these activities were also positively associated with desired program outcomes. For example, help finding a place to live was positively associated with post-program involvement in education.

²² Described by Harvey Krahn, "School-Work Transition: Changing Patterns and Research Needs," p. 43. Consultation paper prepared for Human Resources Development Canada, February 1996. This finding is not surprising given an extremely competitive and demand-driven labour market. When employers have a wide selection of applicants for positions, most of whom have at least the basic skills needed for competence on the job, then they can focus on the softer criteria in their search for the best possible candidate. While a competitive labour market affects the school-to-work transition of all youth, it differentially affects those with significant barriers to employment.

TCs, contractors and MSS staff had diverse definitions of success for YES participants. Obtaining employment or being closer to obtaining it were key parts of the definitions of staff of the two ministries, while for contractors this ranked below participants' personal development or increased self-esteem. For all three groups being active and showing progress towards being employable were considered more important than employment, labour force attachment or even getting off assistance. It was clear that most contractors and the majority of field staff dealing with clients view employment as a long-term outcome, and not something that is immediately achievable for the majority of YES participants.

Yet youth themselves were extremely focused on employment as a goal. They consistently indicated that this was their key objective in participating in YES, but most also indicated that they believed further education or training was an important factor in how they were going to obtain employment. YES participants described the program as having an impact on several types of ability and personal development that related to obtaining employment. The highest ranking of these were three factors that were essential employability skills as defined by the Conference Board of Canada: 1) the ability to work with others, 2) positive attitudes to working, and 3) the ability to communicate effectively.

The second point, positive attitudes to working, is one that the study discovered meant different things to different people. For government staff it typically meant having a good attitude about wanting to work, and being interested in getting a job or into education. For contractors and (it appears) participants, it meant having confidence in their ability to find and succeed in a work or educational setting. This difference in definition had an impact on their relative perspectives on what youth need, and what types of program activities are needed and appropriate.

Youth age 15-18 were seen by contractors and government staff as being less mature, less capable of or ready to make decisions about their work or their lives, with less education, work experience, life skills, stability, or commitment to the program than those 19 and older. Younger participants were described as having more need of harm reduction supports and basic life skills programming.

The participant surveys showed younger aged clients to be marginally less likely to complete projects, be employed after the program, or take skill training after the program than those age 19 and over. Those 15-18 were more likely to enroll in educational upgrading or school completion programs. Younger participants were more likely to have received harm reduction types of support, such as personal counselling, support during a crisis, and help with living situations. Participants age 15-18 were also more likely than those 19 or older to identify either getting a job or getting work experience as their most hoped for benefit from YES.

Key issues concerning the management and delivery of YES related to the impacts of the RFP process, and changes to the roles and responsibilities of staff. Training Consultants expressed a need for training related to their responsibilities, and better clarification of head quarters expectations concerning regional decision making autonomy in the delivery of programs and developing projects.

The RFP process has introduced a competitive environment that has affected contractors' abilities and interest in working cooperatively with one another. It undermines local community development and appears to have reversed some of the gains built up in previous years. A few contractors remain reluctant to offer innovative ideas for projects that they feel could be appropriated from them, with a further requirement that they compete with other agencies to deliver what they had proposed. The Ministry has responded to many concerns raised by contractors, but the impacts remain. This competitive contracting environment is an issue that extends far beyond YES to all programs and services that have delivery contracted with local communities.

The referral process to YES projects has changed significantly across the province over the past two years, and has again changed since the field work for this study was conducted. While self-referral and contractor recruitment were seen to be increasing as referral paths, this is now changing based on accommodating entry into YES projects within the requirements of Youth Works.

The constant change and shifting program and policy environment have contributed to an atmosphere of insecurity and concern within the Ministry and without. Staff and contractors expressed concern about the consistency of messages received in regional office and local communities from head office. The survey of contractors indicated a wide diversity of views regarding the Ministry / contractor relationship. Perhaps the most significant factor affecting the contractors' view of the ministry was the level of contact between the contractor and the Ministry contact person, whether they were a TC, Skills BC Coordinator or Area Manager. Where the Ministry representative was in regular contact with the contractor, views of the Ministry tended to be positive. However, in situations where several months passed between liaison with the Ministry, MSTL was assessed as being overly bureaucratic, unorganized, unclear in goals and objectives, and inflexible.

Youth were far less involved in program decision making and project approvals than anticipated. In part this reflected the rolling over of projects that occurred, which did not offer many opportunities to involve youth in decisions. It also reflected staff's lack of knowledge or training in how to go about inviting and securing youth involvement in the project selection process. Contractors do appear to be involving youth in some planning for projects, but it tends to be haphazard, and it often reflects the "star" youth scenario, in which youth who are outstanding and make the effort to contribute are able to do so. Youth participation in typically under-

resourced, and not developed systematically. Some possible means of increasing youth contribution have been described as best practices.

Finally, elements of successful projects were examined for the program. Key indicators of project success for Training Consultants were 1) participant outcomes, 2) meeting stated project objectives, 3) completion rates for participants, and 4) good project management and staff. Government staff were concerned with referral to appropriate projects, skills and qualifications of staff in the contracting agency, participant follow-up and linkages within the local community. Contractors' key factors for project effectiveness included flexibility in dealing with diverse needs of youth, monitoring and supporting youth in their work placements, and involving youth in planning activities. Having a training allowance or wage stipend was considered to be important by government staff, but contractors and youth participants expressed far less concern about that, indicating that having the program available was more important. However, all groups acknowledged the need for resources to assist with employment and program expenses incurred by participants (for bus passes, etc.).

Project activities associated with an increased probability of post-program paid employment include: job search assistance, training for specific skills, work experience and higher educational attainment prior to YES. Project activities associated with post-program education include: help finding a place to live, help accessing educational upgrading, completing the project, lower educational attainment prior to YES, and being younger in age.

The study identified several types of best practices, and these have been included in the report in three sections that reflect respectively, administrative, youth involvement and project activity best practices. The majority of these were based on existing practices that are done in some but not all (or even most) regions of the province. Some other best practices have been offered as suggestions for potential activities or emphases that could address expressed problems and identified needs.

Conclusions

The analysis of surveys of staff, contractors, and youth participants indicates that the YES program has been providing a range of activities and supports to youth that have been effective in helping youth move towards long-term employment. The program's perceived strengths were its flexibility, diversity of project activities, and accessibility for youth with a wide range of needs and supports. YES has provided a link between harm reduction and basic maintenance supports, and help in obtaining more active labour market participation.

Recent changes to the contracting environment and employment focus of the program have been perceived by many stakeholders both outside and within the Ministry as creating a "missing link." This gap in service to a particularly at-risk

youth population reflects changes in the broader youth program environment, such as the introduction of Youth Works. It also reflects an ongoing debate within the Ministry that has gone on since YES was transferred from MSS -- the question of whether YES should be at MSS or MoEST. For many staff this has been and remains a question of some debate and concern.

One side of this dilemma for the Ministry is that with limited resources and a much higher level of need than can be easily met through programming, it can be argued that YES should help those most likely to be able to benefit immediately from the program. Many of those who have been clients of the program in the past were far from being employed -- they faced multiple barriers and needed extensive and ongoing assistance to reach the goal of employment and economic independence. Further, prior to the transfer between ministries, many YES projects had marginal emphasis on employment supports or on employment, education or training as a concrete goal. There are existing projects that still maintain goals and activities that reflect this older program focus. This is an issue of some relevance to answering the question of whether or not YES is achieving its goal and responding to the mandate of the division and Ministry, because many informants have argued that harm reduction supports are an integral to an emphasis on employment for youth, and that the harm reduction supports are not available elsewhere. It is also an issue because of the context in which some of these projects have been funded until very recently despite the changes to emphasis and focus of the program. Some projects have been maintained in the short term primarily because they are providing a service that is not readily available anywhere else, and some contracts as written do not relate to the actual activities provided through the project.

Some Ministry staff argued that MSS should fill the gap in services. While several contractors felt that the YES program should address these broader objectives, others felt that it really didn't matter where the programs or initiatives were housed, as long as the gaps in service were addressed. Others pointedly called for active coordination among ministries -- specifically MSS, the (then) Skills and Education Ministries, and possibly the Ministry of the Attorney General.

NHN's perspective is that it is important to separate short term needs and actions from long term responsibilities for this issue. The information described in this report about the gap in service is based on survey respondent perceptions. There is certainly strong evidence to assert that there is a serious gap that needs to be addressed. On the other hand, the information relevant to informing policy development is different than that readily available through this type of evaluation study. We see the smoke, but don't have the information needed to identify the location of the fire. Part of the Ministry's longer term action plan must involve additional research into the nature and magnitude of the gap in services to youth.

NHN recommends that the Ministry of Education, Skills and Training establish interim measures to address the immediate shortfall of services and supports to

youth who are most in need of harm reduction supports. This could involve transition funding to projects that do not fit within the newly evolving framework of explicitly employment-focused projects.

Over the longer term, it does not serve the interests of youth or either of the two Ministries involved to be pointing fingers over where responsibility or mandate should reside. There is a need for constructive discussion on responsibility and mandate, and this must involve an analysis of the skills and capabilities necessary to oversee and provide this type of programming, the resources required to make it work, and how these services relate to other programs and services provided to youth. The Youth Transition Commissioner can and should play an important role in recommending and establishing roles and mandates, particularly in a case such as this in which the continuum of client need so clearly spans and overlaps the usual activity boundaries and mandates of the two primary Ministries involved.

There is an additional and alternative perspective on how to address these issues that NHN believes merits serious consideration, and that was supported in principle by community stakeholders. By defining the problem as one that is broader than just the YES program, we can recommend that the government develop a youth strategy or strategic vision of youth programming. Developing this strategy should involve the support and input of the Youth Transition Commissioner.

Such a youth strategy would be: 1) more comprehensive than existing efforts, and able to address the gulf in activities between ministries, 2) clearly focused on appropriate programs and services for those most in need, 3) able to enhance communities' abilities to develop and implement locally relevant and effective programming, and 4) able to provide a clearly articulated and analytical framework that would be helpful for identifying and addressing gaps in service and program overlaps.

A youth strategy has specific implications for the YES program. It could provide a broader strategic vision of youth programs and services, which would mean that local, employment-focused projects could be developed based on community and client need, and that there would be a range of linked and ladder programs available that would be appropriate to the needs of the youth clients. These would include, but not be limited to other YES projects. It would depend on situating YES projects within a network of programs and services that include those provided by MSS, the federal government, local communities and school boards. In terms of the issues of providing harm reduction elements or determining appropriate criteria for measuring the success of a project, this would mean that a range of project types offering different kinds of support would be available, with accountability and success criteria determined separately for each contract, and appropriate for the type of support offered, the characteristics of the client group, and the length and intensity of the intervention.

As a final note, in a study of this magnitude it is typical to develop and provide a framework of recommendations for the program, and the evaluators have done so for this evaluation. Some of these recommendations are fairly low level and have been offered as possible best practices in previous sections of the report. Appendix A summarizes more general recommendations that address possible activities by program management, the Ministry, and government in general.

APPENDIX A

Summary of General Recommendations

APPENDIX A: Summary of General Recommendations

Program Context and Operating Environment

1. Address the gap in service to youth most in need of assistance:
 - Establish interim measures to address the immediate shortfall of services to youth age 15-18 years and those most in need of harm reduction supports;
 - Establish a constructive dialogue involving at a minimum, MoEST, MSS, and the office of the Youth Transition Commissioner, in order to resolve issues of YES program goals and mandate, appropriate Ministry responsibilities, and program and service options;
 - In cooperation with the Youth Transition Commissioner, develop a broad youth strategy that provides a practical and analytical framework for identifying gaps and overlaps in programs and services, and can address youth employment concerns at the interministerial level;
 - Reverse the trend towards a higher degree of homogeneity of projects. Target projects to meet specific community needs, and promote laddering among programs and services.
2. Explore alternative project development options to the RFP process that can maintain accountability and professional contracting practices, but facilitate innovation and flexibility in contracting, and provide contractors and communities with more stability and well-planned programs.

Program Administration

3. Develop a youth advisory committee for the program composed of former participants. Provide them with training and resources so that they can assist with project selection, contract monitoring, and community liaison. Restore links with the Youth in Care Network at the regional office level.
4. Improve internal supports to the delivery of the YES program, by providing Training Consultants with:
 - training related to their role as contract liaison,
 - opportunities to interact with other Training Consultants and share best practices information about administrative procedures, contract management and program activities.

5. Continue to strengthen accountability in project administration through appropriate and contract-specific success criteria that reflect the realities of project activities, community context, and target group.
6. Improve field offices' flexibility to make local decisions about community relevant administrative practices, or help them clarify the scope of the decision-making opportunities that already exist for them. Determine outcomes and requirements centrally, but allow local and regional offices to modify procedures to suit local community needs and capabilities.

APPENDIX B

Research Methodology and Sampling

APPENDIX B: Research Methodology and Sampling

The study was initially conceived as encompassing a quasi-experimental design methodology, using a survey of program participants and a matched sample comparison group of non-participants to determine program impacts. For several reasons it was not possible to conduct the comparison group survey. However, a comparison group was developed using administrative data, and did contribute to the analysis.

A decision was made to do the past participant survey based on 1994/95 fiscal year projects for several reasons. These files were more readily available than older files; they were current enough that Training Consultants would be knowledgeable about the projects; and the project participants would have been in the program less than two years prior to the interview, but would have finished their project with at least six months in which to have been active in the labour market. The latter two points were particularly important for the participant survey. We hoped to gain important post-program outcome information about participants, and we knew that in surveys of this type high response rates are difficult to obtain due to the transience of this population, so we wanted to minimize the time between participation and surveying as much as possible.

Further, the fact that projects were rolled over year to year meant that by examining projects that were active in 1994/95, we would in many instances also be looking at projects that had been active in the previous two years as well. This proved to be the case, as the contractors in our survey had been involved with four projects on average, and 75% of them reported having active projects at least as far back as 1992. We could not find any collated records on 1992 YES statistics or project records, although we did find evidence in current project records that a number of them had been active since that time. Many of the files relevant to examining 1992 and 1993 projects had been shipped back to regional and field offices, and remained in boxes where they could be accessed given the time, resources and sufficient motivation. On the other hand, when we examined several of these files, we determined that they contained too little relevant information to warrant further effort.

It quickly became clear that it would not be possible to approach anything like a random sample of participants. Instead, a purposive sample of projects was developed, based on selecting a cross section of projects that reflected the range and distribution of projects and project types across the province. The key variables on which the projects were selected included: type of contractor (private sector, public sector, non-profit organizations); number of participants (size of the project); dollar value of the project; average cost per participant (this was and remains an estimated value, since exact records of the number of participants in projects are not available for older contracts, and the estimates were based on projected

participation as recorded in proposals); region of the province (and rural/urban split if known); duration of the project experience (known in advance for only about half of the projects); and the actual activities provided and undertaken by participants (classified as job readiness preparation, work experience, or skill training, and again taken from proposals where available).

In this way, 40 projects were selected across the province, and more detailed information about the projects was collected. The evaluation team contacted regional offices and arranged for either photocopies of relevant information from contract files to be sent to the Nanaimo offices, or the actual files were sent to the Vancouver Island Regional office in Nanaimo, examined for relevant contract information, and returned to the originating office. In most cases, the information available in this way consisted of the schedule "A" describing project activities, schedule "B" with financial information about the project, and occasionally the original project proposals or outcome reports. Current project files and proposals were sent for some contracts, because historical material from the 1994/95 fiscal year was not located or considered deficient, and was the basis for our initial understanding of some projects. This did cause some difficulties, in that projects have changed over the past several years, and client activity and costing information often was quite different between 1994/95 contracts and those written up in 1995/96, even in cases in which the project had been "rolled over." The changes to projects were often at the request of the Ministry after the program was transferred, in attempts to give projects a more consistent employment focus.

In order to conduct participant surveys we needed to contact contractors directly, and ask them to give us lists of participants from their 1994/95 projects. Participant records are usually not included in project files within Ministry offices (for privacy requirements, even when Ministry staff are given a list of client records, after the project is over they usually destroy the list of participant names. Further, even when the name is available, it does not usually have phone or contact numbers with it). The sample development process was affected by the introduction of the new contracting procedures. Many contractors had begun to assume that they would automatically have their contracts renewed, and when they were unsuccessful in the RFP process, they were often unprepared for a sudden loss of funding, and were sometimes unavailable to give the evaluators assistance. A few others were uncooperative because they felt no further obligation since they were no longer running a project.

Thirty of the 40 projects selected for the study provided participant names to the evaluation team. Successful interviews were conducted with participants from each of these 30 projects with the range being from 1 interview (for a project that had only one participant), to 32 interviews from one project. In total, 270 past participant interviews were completed, and 82 interviews with current participants. Based on initial participant lists of 1,326 names from the 30 responding contractors (1,090 past participant and 236 current participant), this represents a survey response rate

of 26.6%. The respective response rates for the past and current participant surveys were 24.8% and 34.7%. A particular barrier to achieving a higher response rate for this survey was that many of the youth did not have telephones, either when they were in projects, or at present. Many of the names given on the participant lists by contractors did not include telephone numbers or other contacts for the participants (often the main contact person was the contractor him or herself), and this proved to be an insurmountable hurdle to overcome for many individuals in the sample.

A comparison of the characteristics of the 30 projects for which interviews were completed and the 40 projects that were the sample base showed them to be similar in many ways (see section 3.3.2 for a fuller discussion). However, and as expected, the 30 projects had a bias in terms of larger projects with longer duration interventions and less outreach and harm reduction support emphases. For the sub-group of respondents to the survey, this bias was exacerbated, as the response rates for smaller and outreach types of projects was significantly lower than large and long term projects. This resulted in a group of respondents who were in programs longer, in larger projects, had more and longer duration work experience, and generally had more "success" in post program activities, given that most of these factors were positively associated with post-program employment and education activities. This should be taken into account when examining results for the participant surveys, particularly in extrapolating global results to the population of all YES participants.

For several projects that provided an outreach kind of service to young people who were either on the street or in some other form of unstable living situation, we were able to complete interviews by having the participants (and in some cases past participants) telephone our offices collect from contractor's offices. For several other projects, site visits were made in an attempt to contact youth who were not accessible by telephone by nature of the type of project they were involved with, and the life situation that brought about their participation in the project. In one case, we were able to attend a scheduled meeting involving participating youth, and to spend several hours discussing the project and the views on it of the youth involved. It is important to realize when examining results of the participant surveys that projects providing an outreach component or variable intake / flexible delivery of short-term intervention have been under-represented. Anecdotal information, site visits and a few interviews conducted cannot completely address the absence of representation of participants from these projects in the survey component of the study.

For many projects we were able to obtain two lists of participants from contractors; one of past participants, and another of current participants (or those who had very recently completed their projects). In some cases, the contractor did not make a distinction between past and current participants, and the interviewers were required to make an on-the-spot decision about the category into which the

respondent should be placed. For practical purposes, unless the participant had completed the project within the previous six months, they were considered to be a past participant. In a few cases, individuals who had completed their projects between three and six months prior to the interview were treated as past participants, although most were interviewed with the current participant instrument. The two interview schedules were almost identical, but the current participant survey did not ask questions about post-program activities, and did ask about some intended activities.

The optimal method for studying comparative program impacts is to randomly assign individuals to a program group and a control group.²³ This was not possible for the YES program or its client group for several reasons, of which the most important is the unfairness of the process to individuals denied access to working and learning opportunities. It also was not realistic given the many forms of referral (including self-referral) to the program that are possible.

The next most appropriate method is to develop a comparison group that matches, as closely as possible, the attributes of those participating in the program to those who are non-participants. This is the approach that was intended for this study, but was not possible due to difficulties in obtaining access to a list of names for the comparison group survey. The major problems with this approach would have been selection bias and being able to make an appropriate and successful match in developing the sample. Selection bias was an issue with the YES program, in that the selection and referral process intentionally attempts to identify and assist those most in need of help within the target group. Further, participation has been voluntary, meaning that those participating were distinctly different from those who do not choose to participate. Our main option for dealing with selection bias would have been through the analysis, using cell matching and regression analysis as appropriate and necessary, and using the process evaluation dealing with the methods of selection and referral to establish whether they represent threats to the analysis or good practices worth reinforcing and emulating.

An alternative to the above methods that would be appropriate for gaining solid comparison data would be conducting a long-term panel study following up with participants on a regular basis, and maintaining contact so that attrition biases are minimized and more comprehensive and subtle program impacts could be monitored. NHN suggests that the Ministry begin setting up such a long-term study with the view to having good data relevant to a detailed outcomes evaluation two or three years from now.

²³ See Bill Warburton, *Routes to Independence: The Effectiveness of Employment and Training Programs for Income Assistance Recipients in British Columbia*. 1992.

APPENDIX C

Short Answer Summary of Key Evaluation Questions

APPENDIX C: Evaluation Questions and Study Results

Evaluation Issues and Questions	Study Results (short answer)
1. <i>Is the YES program achieving its goals and objectives?</i> Are participating youth getting jobs and achieving long-term job retention in the labour force? Are participating youth moving on to further education? Are participating youth receiving increased access to education? Are participating youth receiving access to harm reduction support? Are participating youth receiving increased access to training? Are participating youth receiving more work experience opportunities?	In many ways it has been, but there are concerns about current activities. Many youth are obtaining employment, although some are working part-time, and are thus unlikely to be off assistance. About 66% have gained paid employment since participating in YES. Approximately 50% of youth respondents have participated in further education or educational upgrading since the project. Most projects either provide or refer to a wide range of harm reduction supports. Provision is decreasing. Skill training does not appear to be an activity that participants have been able to access as readily as they would like. Most projects offer work experience opportunities, but participants are looking for longer duration and more realistic work experience opportunities

Evaluation Issues and Questions	Study Results (short answer)
2. <i>Is the YES program consistent with government priorities, and is it responding to the Ministry's and Division's mandates?</i> Are program activities pro-actively helping youth to move off income assistance? Are youth becoming more employable (as defined by the Conference Board of Canada Publication on Employability Skills)? Is the program helping those most in need of assistance?	Recent changes to the contracting process appear to have shifted the program away from its initial strengths -- flexibility and the ability to respond to diverse participant needs. A stronger focus on employment has shifted efforts from employability and an awareness of a graduated continuum of employment preparedness. Some youth are gaining full-time employment and getting off Income Assistance. More are taking incremental steps towards employment and economic independence. Past participants indicated that they had gained teamwork and communication skills, and improved attitudes to working - all key employability skills. In the past it appears that YES was helping those most in need. Recent administrative changes to the program have increased the homogeneity of projects, and introduced success criteria that reinforce "creaming" of participants who are most job-ready. A gap in service has developed, particularly for those 15-18 years of age and those most in need of extensive harm reduction supports. Primary level supports have decreased, making the bottom rungs of the employment ladder more difficult to reach for those with multiple barriers.

Evaluation Issues and Questions	Study Results (short answer)
3. <i>Are the intended impacts of the YES program being produced effectively and efficiently?</i> What are participant completion rates? What is the average cost per participant? Do program activities reflect real labour market experiences, or real local labour market needs? Are projects reflecting and responsive to community needs? Are program activities appropriate and worthwhile for participants? What unanticipated outcomes, impacts or external issues are affecting YES projects?	Unintended impacts have reduced effectiveness and efficiency. 75% of survey respondents Participant survey: \$3,123; \$155 / week Across all projects: \$1,691; \$126 / week Many do, but more work experience and skill training opportunities are appropriate. Most skill training is related to service jobs -- real, but entry level. Decreasingly, as projects have become more homogeneous. In many cases, but some participants requested longer duration projects, skill training and work experience opportunities. Further, laddering options have been reduced as project diversity has declined. The contracting process has affected the range and type of opportunities available, and decreased inter-contractor cooperation and support. It has contributed to gaps in services to: 1. younger aged clients 2. clients less employment-ready or in need of substantially more harm reduction support

Evaluation Issues and Questions	Study Results (short answer)
4. <i>How is the YES program being managed and delivered?</i> 4.1 <i>Referrals</i> Who makes referrals? How are youth finding out about projects? What are the impacts of referral avenue (by TC, SW, FAW, other)? How or on what basis are youth selected for projects? Do TC's conduct needs assessments with youth prior to referral?	The delivery of YES has been subject to extensive change over the past two years. Most participants said that they were referred by MSS staff. Contractors have increasingly seen self-referral by potential participants, although new processes appear to have increased TC involvement in the referral or approval process. Contractors and staff that referral by ex-participants is a good measure of a project's success. Most youth hear about the project from MSS staff. Self referral appears to be associated with increased likelihood of project completion. MSS staff refer those who express an interest and have been on assistance for a longer period of time. TCs refer those who qualify. Contractors select those likely to complete. Some do. Many do an Individual Opportunity Plan with those who have already been referred and started a project.

Evaluation Issues and Questions	Study Results (short answer)																																		
4.2 Project activities	<table> <tr> <th>Activity</th><th>% of respondents</th></tr> <tr> <td>help writing a resume</td><td>82%</td></tr> <tr> <td>information on jobs</td><td>81%</td></tr> <tr> <td>help in job search</td><td>80%</td></tr> <tr> <td>training in communication skills</td><td>77%</td></tr> <tr> <td>training in problem solving</td><td>75%</td></tr> <tr> <td>help developing a training plan</td><td>65%</td></tr> <tr> <td>help in keeping a job</td><td>63%</td></tr> <tr> <td>help accessing further education</td><td>63%</td></tr> <tr> <td>pay while training or learning</td><td>59%</td></tr> <tr> <td>help from a mentor</td><td>57%</td></tr> <tr> <td>personal counselling</td><td>55%</td></tr> <tr> <td>work experience</td><td>49%</td></tr> <tr> <td>training in specific skills</td><td>45%</td></tr> <tr> <td>support during a crisis</td><td>45%</td></tr> <tr> <td>training for a specific job</td><td>36%</td></tr> <tr> <td>help finding a place to live</td><td>20%</td></tr> </table>	Activity	% of respondents	help writing a resume	82%	information on jobs	81%	help in job search	80%	training in communication skills	77%	training in problem solving	75%	help developing a training plan	65%	help in keeping a job	63%	help accessing further education	63%	pay while training or learning	59%	help from a mentor	57%	personal counselling	55%	work experience	49%	training in specific skills	45%	support during a crisis	45%	training for a specific job	36%	help finding a place to live	20%
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What types of activities are being done? (Harm reduction, training, skill development, career planning)																																			
Are projects delivered as a package to all participants, or is there variation in components and delivery?	There is some variation within projects to meet the needs of individual participants. For example, not all receive work experience, if the individual isn't ready.																																		
How do projects respond to the different needs of individual participants in projects?	Some projects offer several paths through program activities, or links to other projects (internal and external).																																		
How do 15-18 and 19-24 aged youth differ in what they receive and how they benefit from projects?	Younger clients are less mature and tend to be more in need of harm reduction supports. They also tend to be more employment focused.																																		
What portion of participants are part of the target group? Are there different impacts on non-target participants?	About 3% of participants appear to have been over 25 years of age. It was not possible in the study to identify those who were not on Income Assistance.																																		
How serious is attrition, and what is being done about it?	Anecdotal information indicates that attrition is not a serious problem, though 72% of TCs agreed that "attrition is a problem for the YES program."																																		

Evaluation Issues and Questions	Study Results (short answer)
<i>4.3 Roles & responsibilities</i> Are ministry communications about goals, objectives, policies and procedures clear to contractors? What support does the ministry provide, particularly in getting projects up and running? Are expectations clearly communicated? Are monitoring procedures in place? What type of follow-up or long-term tracking is being done? What are the responsibilities of participating youth in the projects?	Two thirds of contractors disagreed, and a quarter strongly disagreed with the statement "the Ministry communicates its goals and objectives clearly to contractors," and 58% of contractors disagreed with the statement "the Ministry's policies have been made clear to contractors." Contractors expressed concern about the frequency and type of contact with TCs and other staff. In particular, they were interested in having reciprocal relationships that included active support rather than simply monitoring and concerns with accountability. A third of TCs agreed with the statement "contractors do not understand what we expect of them." Monitoring procedures are being developed, but there have been inconsistencies in how it has been done and by whom. Contractors say they do follow-up, but it appears to be quite haphazard. Most is short term, and does not involve long-term tracking. Youth appear to contribute to carrying out project activities, and have fewer opportunities to be involved in designing and managing projects, or participating in project development or selection.

Evaluation Issues and Questions	Study Results (short answer)
<i>4.4 Linkages</i> What are the linkages with community employers? What are the linkages with MSS?	Primarily through contractors developing work experience. Individual TCs and managers have developed direct linkages with those doing referrals. Project information is provided to MSS staff and other stakeholders via manuals in some offices.
<i>5. What is the level and extent of youth involvement in planning and overseeing the YES program?</i> Are the Youth in Care Network and Child and Youth committees involved in YES? Are they validating contracts or projects? Are youth involved in project planning? design? management? delivery? What types of activities? What can be done to increase youth participation in projects?	Minimally. CYC involvement and effectiveness is variable; some are active, others have no relation with YES. Neither have had extensive involvement in validating contracts or projects. Youth appear to contribute to carrying out project activities, and have fewer opportunities to be involved in designing and managing projects, or participating in project development or selection. Some projects have invited past participants to sit on steering committees and be involved in peer counselling. • Involve past participants • Consult other youth organizations • Provide adequate resources • Develop youth steering committee

Evaluation Issues and Questions	Study Results (short answer)
6. <i>What are the elements of a successful YES project?</i> What are the elements common to successful projects?	* Good skills and qualifications of the contractor * Knowledge of the target group * Doing follow-up * Strong community linkages (MSS, other agencies, employers) * Make good referrals * Flexible in dealing with youth * Involve youth in planning activities * Variety of project activities * Provide work experience * Provide strong harm reduction supports or referrals to them * Provide job search assistance * Longer duration projects * Skill training provided * Well promoted projects -- make sure people know about them * Supports to address client barriers, such as bus passes and child care assistance